

DEWEYAN INQUIRY AND THE EPISTEMIC DEFENCE OF DEMOCRACY

EPISTEMOLOGY OR POLITICS?
DEWEYAN INQUIRY AND THE EPISTEMIC DEFENCE OF DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

I propose a Deweyan understanding of the relationship between epistemology and politics. The standards of legitimate political debate are an irreducibly political concern and cannot be invoked to justify the politics they facilitate. Yet, such standards cannot be left outside of the scope of legitimate political discourse, because they are both politically contestable and politically significant. A Deweyan account of inquiry, extended to moral and political questions, provides fruitful ground for integrating epistemological concerns within a political framework without reducing either kind of consideration to the other.

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Chapter 1

On Epistemic Defenses of Democracy

IN THE PAST decade, especially in the tradition of American pragmatism, there has been growing interest in providing what are called epistemic defenses of democracy. Although similar to the arguments advanced by David Estlund (2008) and Elizabeth Anderson (2006), the pragmatist, and particularly neo-Peircean variants of such arguments have distinctive and problematic justificatory aims, or so I will argue. Eric MacGilvray takes such accounts, championed primarily by Cheryl Misak, Robert Westbrook, and Robert Talisse to involve the claim that “the relationship of belief, truth, and inquiry ... points in a decisively democratic direction” (2007, 7). What is interesting about such projects is that they take the commitment to democratic politics to follow not merely from certain characteristically pragmatist epistemological theses, such as fallibilism, but from the very commitment to pragmatism itself. As MacGilvray puts the point, according to these accounts, to be “a pragmatist who thinks about politics, is to be *committed* to participatory democracy” (4).

MacGilvray’s concern is that epistemic defenses of democracy misidentify assertion, rather than doubt, as central to pragmatist accounts of belief. However, I think that the issue goes much deeper, as these epistemic justifications of democracy also run contrary to pragmatism as an anti-foundational philosophy. This feature ultimately poses problems for the substantive accounts of democracy that supposedly follow from purely epistemological considerations regarding belief, assertion, and inquiry. I propose a Deweyan understanding of the integration of epistemology and politics. On this view, neither epistemology nor politics takes priority over the other, yet the commitment to both have important synergies – they foster and promote one another. A Deweyan understanding of democracy, in particular Deweyan claims about how epistemological considerations should be integrated with democratic theory, is not only viable, but preferable to its recent neo-Peircean alternatives.

There are two different, but related, senses of ‘democracy’. On the one hand, there is an institutional meaning of democracy. ‘Democracy’ of this kind refers to practices of voting and universal suffrage. Related to such practices, democracy also refers to varieties of majority rule and systems of self-governance. On the other hand, democracy has a moral dimension, referring to the commitment to egalitarianism – the freedom and equality of persons. Of course, this characterization leaves ‘free’ and ‘equal’ as terms in need of elaboration. And elaboration is often done in terms of institutional procedures. However, ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’ can no less be characterized as features of a democratic culture – a moral community in which free speech, freedom of association, freedom of thought, and practices of moral deliberation with one’s fellows are paramount.

In what follows, I use the terms democracy, liberal democracy, and democratic deliberation for the most part interchangeably. As my concern is how to articulate the role of epistemic features in an account of democracy, I readily endorse Misak’s characterization of democratic societies as ‘cultures of justification’. It is to say that a community is democratic insofar as its members are willing to engage in moral and political deliberation with their peers. I consider such an account of democracy a liberal one insofar as it takes the commitment to egalitarianism as of central importance. As Melvin Rogers has put the point, “unlike other political ideals, democracy makes the practice of reason-giving constitutive to how it handles and legitimizes its ongoing affairs” (Rogers 2009, 212).

To describe democracy in these terms is to emphasize its moral, rather than institutional dimension. I have little to say about democratic institutions such as elections, voting, and representative government. This is not because these are unimportant features of a democratic society, but because my concern is primarily metaphilosophical – how to understand the integration of epistemic and political considerations in a theory of democracy, particularly a pragmatist one.

1.1 Misak and the Legitimation Problem

In *Truth, Politics, and Morality* (2000) Cheryl Misak argues that because people, insofar as they have beliefs, assert them as true, they are obliged to respond to dissenting arguments put forward by others. To do otherwise is to demonstrate that one is not serious in one's belief. Further, to the extent that one fails, or refuses, to engage those who dispute the truth of one's beliefs, one compromises one's standing as a rational being. To do so demonstrates that such people are unwilling to properly defend their belief by failing to take seriously the beliefs of others.¹ Insofar as one has any beliefs at all, especially beliefs about political and moral issues, one is implicitly committed to the egalitarian ideal and democratic practice of deliberating with one's fellow citizens.

An important implication of this thesis is that “a political or moral theory cannot simply ignore such responses [i.e., anti-democratic, inegalitarian, and illiberal arguments]. It must have resources to deal with them; it must have something to say about why it is that such responses are mistaken” (Misak 2000, 12). This demand is fair. However, the form her response takes is deeply problematic. Misak's answer to the challenge of illiberals (e.g. Carl Schmitt) and skeptics (she takes Richard Rorty to be one) takes the form of an ‘epistemic defence’ of democracy – an account that purports to establish why the commitment to democracy is the correct, if not necessary, one to have insofar as we are rational believers. Indeed, she is concerned that in the absence of a non-circular argument in its favour, a preference for democracy lacks legitimacy.

Her response to illiberal and skeptical challenges to democracy is that to the extent that people have any beliefs at all, they are committed the democratic ideal of deliberating with their fellows, whether or not they explicitly accept this commitment. However, engaging illiberal arguments in this way makes the stakes of her argument anti-skeptical. The assumption motivating her argument is that an adequate account of democracy must explain why the commitment to liberal democracy is the right one to have for any rational agent.

¹ See, for example, her treatment of Carl Schmitt, p. 103. I will discuss this case in more depth in the fourth chapter.

1.2 Robert Talisse and Pluralism

Robert Talisse builds upon Misak's work by developing her epistemic defence of democracy as a response to John Rawls' concerns about reasonable pluralism. In a democratic society, Rawls argues, there are any number of comprehensive doctrines – accounts of 'the good' of society – that are equally reasonable yet incommensurable. In order to respect such pluralism, Rawls argues that an adequate account of liberal democracy should require any acceptable substantive political claim to be justified in terms that are acceptable to any group.² This consideration leads Rawls to his notion of political liberalism – a liberalism justified by 'overlapping consensus'. This is to say that the commitment to principles such as free speech, freedom of association, and so on, must be arrived at and agreed to by using the various resources of these various reasonable comprehensive doctrines. In this sense, Rawls considers his account of liberalism appropriately neutral. For him, the commitment to liberal democratic principles should not (or perhaps cannot) be justified in any singular and universal way, but should rather be understood as distinctively *political* requirements for negotiating with the brute fact that people can reasonably disagree about the goods that society should pursue as well as how these goods are to be secured.

Talisse argues that this line of reasoning about pluralism leads Rawls to an impoverished justification for democracy. Rawls' 'political' justification for liberal politics is flawed because his suggestion for addressing pluralism depends upon a prior acceptance of liberal principles. To put it in Talisse's terms, Rawls' defence of democracy rests upon substantial political theses that can be reasonably rejected. Thus, his justification of democracy is at best half-hearted: it cannot establish why any particular person should accept democratic politics over its alternatives.³ Rawls merely describes the concessions that various groups must make in order to coexist in a democratic society. But such an account cannot justify why any such group should participate in a pluralist democracy.

² Gerald Gaus has recently called this 'shared reasons' conception of political argument into question (2011, 283–292).

³ Talisse quotes and eventually sides with Dworkin on this issue (2007, 85).

While Talisse concedes Rawls' point that appealing to substantial political notions to justify politics is problematic, he advocates a position similar to Misak by arguing that we can advocate democracy on purely epistemic grounds. While he concedes that such an account is in some sense perfectionist – it is aspirationalist in upholding normative demands for belief and deliberation – he considers this unproblematic because these norms are epistemic, rather than moral.

Although basing a politics upon substantive moral demands runs contrary to pluralism, and is therefore suspect as an account of democracy, Talisse argues that upholding epistemic norms as the basis of democracy places no such controversial or coercive requirements upon individuals or groups because the Peircean account of inquiry he advocates is internal to any believer's system.⁴ To invoke epistemic norms regarding the nature of belief to justify politics, he argues, avoids ruling out or illicitly limiting the possibility of reasonable disagreement because any comprehensive doctrine, insofar as it is reasonable, already employs Peircean standards of responsible belief.

1.3 The Stakes for Pragmatist Political Philosophy

In addition to bringing Misak's justificatory project to bear on Rawlsian political philosophy, Talisse argues, contrary to the usual reading of pragmatist political thought, that Peirce, rather than Dewey, provides the most viable account of democracy. Talisse develops his argument in explicit opposition to what he calls 'Deweyan' accounts of democracy. Insofar as Deweyan politics depends upon controversial norms such as 'growth' and describes democracy as a 'way of life', he argues that this vision of democracy can be reasonably rejected and, to that extent, provides an inadequate if not deeply flawed account of democratic politics. Although the identification of Deweyan democracy with a substantial notion of growth is controversial (and will be discussed in more length in chapter 5), by rejecting Deweyan democracy Talisse more strikingly overlooks, if not outright dismisses, the anti-foundational elements of pragmatism.

⁴ A fuller treatment of this argument will be provided in §5.2.

The justificatory demand common to Misak and Talisse and, indeed, any epistemic defence of democracy is ultimately that we require a non-circular argument to prefer democratic political arrangements. According to Misak, we must be able to provide an argument to prefer democracy that survives the challenges put forward by illiberals such as Carl Schmitt. More strongly, an adequate response is one that does not implicitly appeal to democratic values such as a commitment to egalitarianism when arguing in their favour. For Misak such an argument must be politically neutral because otherwise it begs the question. This demand, at least as pursued by Misak and Talisse, is foundational because it requires recourse to apolitical premises – premises that are legitimate for nonpolitical reasons – in justifying or responding to political questions. More problematically, this line of reasoning suggests that apolitical premises are required if politics is to be properly justified.

The foundational motivations behind epistemic defences of democracy are made more acute in Talisse's work. After agreeing with Misak in requiring a non-circular argument for democracy, he explicitly attempts to meet this requirement by deriving political and moral norms from epistemic ones. While his epistemic claims about the nature of belief play a crucial role in his arguments for certain political commitments, and thus function as political premises (in a sense), their role is foundational insofar as considerations of the nature of belief are politically neutral – i.e., they, he claims, presuppose no particular political commitments. He considers appeal to Peircean epistemic premises uncontroversial because these norms are “already *implicit* in any reasonable comprehensive doctrine” (2007, 87). More strongly, he claims, “the Peircean conception of democracy appeals to only those norms that are already presupposed by the very idea of reasonable rejection. Accordingly, it is composed of norms that are *not* themselves reasonably rejectable” (87, emphasis mine). Once again, as a justificatory demand, it forces a foundational answer in presuming that we can not only provide a universal justification of democratic preferences, but that, short of hypocrisy, no suitably reflective and reasonable individual could fail to be committed to democratic deliberation.

1.4 Reading Dewey: A Case Study

Although I think that Deweyan pragmatism should not be involved in this justificatory project, my view is controversial. For example, Robert Westbrook, Dewey's latest biographer, has enthusiastically endorsed Misak's justification of democracy as something that "would have delighted Dewey" (2005, 51). And in "A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy" Hilary Putnam argues that Dewey's theory of inquiry provides a reason to consider democratic practices, institutions, and societies superior to their alternatives. In his words, "the need for such fundamental democratic institutions as freedom of thought and speech follows, for Dewey, from requirements of scientific procedure in general: the unimpeded flow of information and the freedom to offer and to criticize hypotheses" (1995, 188, emphasis mine). This is to say that the way in which beliefs come to be justified or, to use Deweyan jargon, the way in which intelligent, scientific people resolve problematic situations and conduct their inquiries, tells us something substantial about the form of politics that should be endorsed and pursued. More specifically, the requirements of experimental practices tell us that democratic practices are ideal.

While Philip Deen is thus on fairly solid ground when he calls for Deweyans to be 'included' in the current debate over epistemic defences of democracy, there remain good Deweyan reasons to avoid these projects as they are currently framed. The justifications that Talisse and others provide for democracy run contrary to characteristically pragmatist, and particularly Deweyan, theses of holism, fallibilism, and anti-foundationalism.

Although his account is unblinkingly revisionist, these aspects of Dewey's thought have been most developed and, more notoriously, radicalized by Richard Rorty. When considering the relationship between philosophy and democratic politics in "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy", Rorty, claiming to be a Deweyan, presents the challenging view:

The philosopher of liberal democracy may wish to develop a theory of the human self that comports with the institutions he or she admires. But such a philosopher is not thereby justifying these institutions by reference to more

fundamental premises, but the reverse: He or she is putting politics first and tailoring a philosophy to suit. (1991, 178)

This statement does not deny that there is an important project of articulating what our commitment to liberal democracy does or should involve. However, it does mean that we cannot and should not invoke putatively purely epistemological considerations to justify political practices. To do so mistakenly reverses what Rorty considers to be the right order of explanation. Democratic political practices should be freestanding – able to continue, however naïvely, in the absence of second-order philosophical justifications. Similarly, they can stand without philosophical, as distinct from political, legitimation. Rorty contends that it is not only problematic but misleading to draw political conclusions from epistemological premises. Further, he remains unconvinced that epistemological theses can or should be invoked to justify the endorsement of particular political programs. Most radically, he suggests that we can wholly do without epistemology when describing the commitment to democracy.

On this point Rorty parts company from Dewey, but it is important to provide context to his claim that epistemological considerations should be exorcised from democratic theory. Aside from his book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty makes this criticism most explicitly in his reading of Dewey's philosophy of education. For Dewey, education should have an important, if not crucial, role in democratic culture. In addition to requiring that a democratic polity have a certain base of shared knowledge and belief, he insists that there are certain habits – critical, experimental, and open or non-dogmatic ones – which must be promoted for the growth and maintenance of democratic life. Thus he often lamented that alongside the development of scientific theories and technological progress, a corresponding change in political and moral habits and attitudes has not occurred (QC: 159). Although people have no problem employing or enjoying the fruits of technological and scientific advances, there has been a failure to take these successes to heart as Dewey thinks democrats should. The “scientific attitude” of experimental engagement with one's beliefs is hardly widespread, yet for Dewey, developing and promoting such intellectual habits should be a

crucial goal of education in a genuinely democratic society.

When Rorty reads such statements from Dewey he sees them as covert advocacy for the liberal democratic politics that Dewey develops in other contexts. While Rorty endorses this political project, he suggests that Dewey would have been on better grounds if he were upfront and explicit that his goal in providing a philosophy of education is “to move society to the political left by moving successive generations of students to the left of their parents” – to admit, in other words, that he is engaged in cultural politics rather than framing this project in terms of an epistemologically and politically-loaded philosophy of education (1981, xi–xii). According to Rorty, therefore, the role of education in democracies is ultimately a matter of culture and politics – it is a means for socializing future generations in order that they become more amenable to democratic forms of interaction. While he agrees that it is better to resolve disputes with words rather than violence, and that we should strive to find common ground with those who disagree with us, these norms, he suggests, can and should be articulated without recourse to epistemological notions such as ‘intelligence’, ‘inquiry’, or ‘rationality’.

Of course, Dewey’s self-understanding of his educational project is more traditional, as he considers the fostering of certain epistemic habits and attitudes as vital to democratic life. That he elaborates the connection between education and democracy at least partially in terms of an account of experimental, ‘scientific’ methods seems to commit him to some form of epistemic account of democratic practices: the form of politics to be ultimately endorsed is seemingly chosen because it conforms to certain epistemological considerations, just as Putnam said. Although it is common to attribute this account to Dewey, it is not obvious that he would wholly endorse this reading. Nor is it obvious that we should endorse these justificatory projects in his name.

While Dewey undoubtedly saw an important place for education in democratic societies, he justified this role on *both* epistemic *and* political grounds. There is thus a sense in which Westbrook and Putnam are right, because Dewey *does* sometimes talk about politics in epistemic terms. However, this reading is at best partial because the road goes the other

way as well: the value of epistemology is simultaneously understood in undeniably political terms.

Although it is necessary to resist Rorty's anti-epistemological reading of Dewey, I consider it no less important to resist Westbrook and Putnam's epistemic readings of Deweyan politics. The value of this more balanced approach is suggested by Alan Ryan in *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*. He draws attention to Dewey's denial of priority to either epistemology or politics. When confronted with a choice between theory and practice, epistemology or politics, Dewey largely resisted reducing either of these to the other. I argue that this resistance allows Dewey to avoid a quasi-foundational epistemic defence of democracy, while still providing an account of the importance of certain epistemic practices in this form of politics. In the terms I later elaborate, this is to say that Dewey provides an epistemic *account* of democracy without an epistemic *defence* of it.

To summarize the views I navigate between, it will be helpful to keep the following positions in mind:

EPISTEMIC DEFENSES – I reserve the phrase 'epistemic defense' to refer to the justificatory project common to Misak and Talisse. What makes an account of democracy a 'defense', in this sense, is that it attempts to provide a universal and unequivocal answer to the question 'why live democratically?' Additionally, in rejecting circular arguments as inadequate for a proper justification, epistemic defenses require apolitical – politically neutral – grounds in order for democratic commitments to be considered legitimate. In the cases I discuss and criticize, these premises are epistemic.

EPISTEMIC ACCOUNTS – In contrast to 'epistemic defenses', 'epistemic accounts' of democracy are those in which epistemic concerns play an important role in how we articulate the commitment to democracy. I endorse such a view and take David Estlund and Elisabeth Anderson, among others, to hold similar positions. While on such a view, epistemic features are important in an account of democracy, these are not treated as a non-circular and politically neutral grounds for justifying the commitment to democratic norms. Unlike epistemic defenses, therefore, epistemic accounts of democracy are non-foundational.

RORTIAN IRONISM – On my account (§4.1), ironism is a form of anti-foundationalism in political philosophy. The qualification of 'ironism' as Rortian signifies the separation of the anti-foundational strain of Rorty's work (to which Dewey and Rawls have some sympathy) from the anti-epistemological strain of Rorty's thought. While I concede that Deweyan pragmatism should be understood as sharing important sympathies with Rorty's discussions of anti-

foundationalism in both epistemology and politics, I resist Rorty's claims that Dewey's discussions of inquiry and knowledge amount to little more than moral and political ideals.

My concerns are twofold. First, epistemic defences of democracy run afoul of legitimate pragmatist, and particularly Deweyan scruples about foundationalism. Such accounts of democratic practices are problematic insofar as they attempt to legitimize their adoption in terms of purportedly apolitical considerations about the concepts of truth and inquiry. Second, the attempt to justify politics in this way runs into substantive problems for the conception of democracy advocated, especially with regard to the role of epistemological concerns in these accounts. The remedy for both problems is to adopt a Deweyan account of the role of inquiry in democracy. On such an account, epistemological and political considerations are related synergistically rather than asymmetrically and foundationally – neither has priority over the other, yet the adoption of democracy facilitates and promotes practices of inquiry, and vice versa.

Having to this point provided an interpretation of what would plausibly be Dewey's attitude towards epistemic defences of democracy, it is important to distance the account I will provide from matters of commentary. Throughout this work, when I refer to, and advocate for, a 'Deweyan' account of inquiry, politics, and their integration, it is meant in the same sense that Misak and Talisse employ when they describe their accounts as 'Peircean.' I start from a Deweyan understanding of inquiry, i.e., his epistemology, and elaborate some of its political implications. Although, unlike Peirce, Dewey had a philosophical account of democracy that is worthy of attention in its own terms, this should not count against my qualified use of the word 'Deweyan.'⁵

In prioritizing Dewey's approach to epistemology it is likely, if not inevitable, that I will emphasize certain elements of his politics more than he did in his own work. Similarly, I will take it to be unsurprising if other aspects of his account, often taken to be central, end

⁵ Peirce himself explicitly distanced his epistemological discussions from social and political claims. With respect to those beliefs, he described himself as "an old-fashioned christian, a believer in the efficacy of prayer, an opponent of female suffrage and of universal male suffrage, in favour of letting business-methods develop with the interference of law, a disbeliever in democracy, etc. etc." Quoted in Westbrook, *Democratic Hope*, p.

up being of secondary importance in the account I provide. My approach could even result in a discussion of democratic practices which is not wholly coherent with Dewey's own account. I am comfortable with such possibilities. I am drawing on the resources of Dewey's thought to respond to a contemporary problem that he did not face, or fully anticipate. Given the central issue of my project – epistemic defences of democracy – it happens that these resources are derived primarily from his epistemology, rather than his political works.

Having noted the spirit in which I approach Dewey's work, it is worth mentioning what is to be gained from this strategy. Examining the political implications of Dewey's theory of inquiry will provide a clear basis for assessing whether Dewey's philosophy sustains an epistemic defence of democracy, as Westbrook and Putnam claim. If this were the case, the epistemology on its own would be sufficient for justifying his vision of democracy. Second, examining the extent to which Dewey's epistemology is politically non-neutral will help us appreciate and respond to the criticisms that both Rorty and Talisse direct against it. It provides a middle ground between Rorty's account of politics' independence from epistemology and Talisse's epistemic defence of democracy. Considering Dewey's account of inquiry, in particular, reveals that he would share some of Rorty's concerns with such justificatory projects, while simultaneously resisting Rorty's contention that epistemological considerations are wholly inappropriate to an account of democratic politics.

1.5 Chapter Outlines

Chapter 2 In the next chapter, I develop a Deweyan account, in the qualified sense noted above, of the epistemic demands of democratic political culture. I distance my account from his (and commentators') discussions of democracy as 'a way of life' and emphasize instead Dewey's discussion of democracy as demanding certain critical and experimental habits. Such an account provides the best grounds for assessing whether his thought sustains an epistemic defence of democracy. I provide an interpretation of Dewey's theory of inquiry and its extension to ethics and politics, and elaborate Dewey's understanding of science primarily as a method of inquiry, examining why he thinks that this model can be seamlessly

extended to problems of politics and morality. I explore the prospects of Dewey's claims that a scientific approach to ethics is not only attainable, but of vital importance. This discussion requires a detailed account of the critical and experimental habits he lauds, and provides an opportunity for examining their implications for political deliberation. I show how his epistemology lends itself to a particular vision of liberal politics – i.e., how it is politically non-neutral. It is, as Rorty has claimed, “better suited to liberal and secular projects than it is for religious and conservative ones” (1981, xiii).

Chapter 3 I turn, in chapter 3, to Richard Rorty's criticism of Dewey's epistemological pretences, and contextualize it with respect to Rorty's more general challenge to epistemological philosophy. Doing so exposes what is at stake in Rorty's dismissal of epistemology, as Dewey's account of inquiry shares few of the assumptions that Rorty criticizes in epistemology, yet Rorty finds it nonetheless problematic. I connect this discussion to Rorty's liberal ironism – his antifoundationalism with respect to politics – as well as his attempt to reconstruct Dewey as providing such an account of politics. In particular, I explore how Rorty's arguments play out with respect to Dewey's account of education in democracy. I detail Rorty's positive account of education and politics in order to make explicit what he takes to be living and dead in Dewey's thought and what he considers to be the advantages of his own view, which advocates for the divorce of epistemology from politics.

Chapter 4 In chapter 4 develop a critique of epistemic defences of democracy. While I share Rorty's meta-philosophical scruples about 'grounding' politics in the manner of Misak and Talisse, I argue that Dewey's work provides a way to see epistemology and politics as integrated without falling into the problematic claim that epistemology 'legitimizes' or 'grounds' political theory. The account I advocate is that epistemology as inquiry is synergistic rather than foundational with the commitment to democratic politics. Both promote each another. However, this does not imply that either can or should be treated as prior to the other.

Chapter 5 In chapter 5 I contrast my account of epistemology in democracy with Talisse’s Peircean defence of democracy and his argument that a Deweyan account is incompatible with political pluralism. Talisse’s account, I argue, implies a false neutrality for its epistemological claims and to that extent is misleading in its claim to provide a more suitable ground for democratic ideals than Deweyan epistemology does. Because the Deweyan account I provide accommodates deep disagreement, it has no difficulty accommodating political pluralism. While such an account is politically non-neutral, it is structured in such a way that its acknowledged non-neutrality is a virtue rather than a deficiency. Further, by combining political non-neutrality with the demand that any claim be open to experimental development, a Deweyan account of inquiry represents an important strategy for engaging with pluralism in a democratic society. Epistemic considerations, while not serving a foundational role are, contrary to Rorty’s charge, nonetheless playing an indispensable one.

Chapter 2

From Deweyan Inquiry to Deweyan Politics

GREGORY PAPPAS HAS noted that “readers of his [Dewey’s] ethics not acquainted with his logic are left without the more systematic and formal bases of the method Dewey called intelligence. Meanwhile, those acquainted only with his writings in logic and epistemology may be left without a clear idea of how intelligence is actually operative or embodied in the process of making moral and political decisions” (2008, 240). These remarks confirm that examinations of Dewey’s political philosophy and works exploring his epistemology have largely proceeded in isolation from each other, to the detriment of both. Pappas attempts to bridge this gap by exploring Dewey’s account of communication. This approach follows lines pursued by Thomas Alexander, Stephen Neubert, Michael Eldridge, and Matthew Festenstein, who emphasize the cultural dimension of Dewey’s account of democracy. While this tack ameliorates the tendency to overlook Dewey’s account of inquiry in discussions of politics, emphasizing the cultural dimension of Dewey’s account risks leaving us without resources for responding to Rorty’s claim that Dewey should be read as engaged in a purely political project – one that has no use for epistemic terms such as ‘knowledge’, ‘intelligence’, or ‘inquiry’ (§3.4).

At the same time, the emphasis on democratic culture fails to provide clear ground for engaging with purely epistemic readings of Dewey’s politics. While Dewey would have been largely happy with Cheryl Misak’s description of democracy as involving “a culture of justification”, conceding that Dewey sought to foster a certain epistemic culture through his educational works does not tell us whether those arguments regarding education, intelligence, and inquiry should be treated as attempts to legitimize rather than merely elaborate a vision of democracy.

In order to assess that question, in this chapter I trace the moral and political implications

of Dewey's epistemological views, providing a fuller understanding of his discussion of scientific inquiry and its role in democratic societies. I note the political non-neutrality of this account, which is the common target of both Richard Rorty and Robert Talisse in their criticism of the Deweyan integration of epistemology and politics. This chapter provides the background for appreciating their concerns as well as the basis for my eventual response to each.

Jim Garrison notes, "generations of educators have terribly misread Dewey's remarks on the role of science in education" (2001, 64), which suggests that little has changed since James Marshall's (1984) complaint that the view of science commonly, but mistakenly attributed to Dewey is "deficient" (66).¹ Both commentators explain such misunderstandings as arising from the anachronistic attempt to read Dewey's theory of inquiry through the lens of a logical positivist philosophy of science, whether 'rehabilitating' Dewey's account by considering it a variation of a 'hypothetico-deductive' model of science, or describing it as resting on a traditional empiricist account of the role of experience in knowledge.

Dewey, however, shares few of the assumptions that vitiated such projects. His philosophical account of knowledge even provides grounds for critiquing the epistemological tradition.² Thus, Barry Allen has claimed that "when [the ideas of the positivists] withered under the post-positivist critique, Dewey was unscathed. Pragmatism always was an alternative to logical positivism, even before disappointed positivists started calling for one" (2010, 75). Despite such warnings of caution when reading Dewey, his rhetoric surrounding science nonetheless comes off as overblown at best, naïve at worst. While some of this rhetoric is indeed overblown, it is not so in the ways one might expect. Further, the way in which Dewey seemingly overstates the importance of what he calls 'scientific method' is not wholly unmotivated and, in fact, provides insight into his understanding of both ethics and politics.

¹ Marshall later describes such accounts of science as "inadequate and impossible to defend" but forgets that the view in question is *not* endorsed by Dewey (2001, 92).

² Dewey preferred to describe his account of knowledge as a 'logic', reserving the term 'epistemology' for the Cartesian–Kantian tradition he attempts to overcome.

Pappas thus raises a legitimate concern when he notes that “one cannot take Dewey’s remarks about a ‘science of ethics’ at face value. These remarks seem objectionable or outrageous only if one does not have the background understanding of what Dewey meant by ‘science’ or the ‘scientific method’ ” (1997, 521). For this reason, I begin by detailing Dewey’s account of inquiry, which describes the development of knowledge through critical practices of experimentation. Along the way, I emphasize the important features of the account for ethics and politics. A non-exhaustive list includes the following:

ANTI-SCIENTISM – Dewey’s emphasis on ‘science’ does not commit him to a scientific view of knowledge, ethics, or politics. He distrusts attempts to treat the results of science as ultimate and absolute authorities over knowledge in any domain and rather discusses ‘science’ at length to emphasize its methods of inquiry – its practices of acquiring, testing, and refining knowledge. These methods, he contends, exemplify the following features:

NON-FOUNDATIONALISM – In addition to the claim that there are no foundational beliefs in the practice of inquiry, Dewey additionally claims that self-corrective practices of inquiry can not and should not be justified by ‘external’ standards, e.g. a priori consideration of the nature of rationality, justification, or Truth. This is to say that although inquiring into successful practices of inquiry employs the very methods at issue, such inquiries are the only grounds we have to criticize or determine the success of certain practices of inquiry. In short, practices of inquiry cannot be underwritten or legitimated by standards that are themselves immune to practices of inquiry.

HOLISM – In the course of inquiry we inevitably use beliefs, the results of previous inquiries, to test new or prior knowledge.

FALLIBALISM – Although we cannot doubt all beliefs at once, any particular belief is open to revision in the face of subsequent inquiry.

While both Pappas (1997, 2008) and Christine McCarthy (1999) have provided accurate elaborations of the connection between inquiry and ethics in Dewey’s thought, neither have explicitly drawn out the political implications of this account. Although Pappas, for one, places his discussion of Dewey’s ‘scientific ethics’ in the broader context of Dewey’s political thought, this way of rendering the project presents such a connection as unproblematic. A major goal of this chapter is to provide the background required to assess whether Deweyan inquiry provides grounds for an epistemic defence of democracy. To this end, I will first provide an interpretation of Dewey’s account of inquiry and then elaborate some of its

political implications by examining his notion of a ‘scientific ethics’. I begin by discussing how Dewey frames his theory of knowledge, particularly the problems to which he directs it as a response. Such details should stave off concerns that the Deweyan account of inquiry is a scientific account of science or implies a scientific attitude towards politics.

2.1 Scientism and Naturalism

Cognizant of the fact that discussions of science are often controversial when extended to problems of value, Dewey sketches a dichotomy that provides the poles between which he intends to navigate:

There exist on one hand efforts to use scientific knowledge to substantiate moral and religious beliefs, either with respect to some specific form in which they are current or in some vague way that is felt to be edifying and comforting. On the other hand, philosophers derogate the importance and necessity of [such] knowledge in order to make room for an undisputed sway of some set of moral and religious tenets. (QC: 238)

The tenuous relationship between scientific knowledge and value claims is found in the tendency either to emphasize the importance of knowledge, treating disputes about values as largely resolvable, if not resolved by appeals to ‘the facts’, or to emphasize the autonomy of value claims, which are taken to be wholly independent of factual matters. In either case, Dewey sees the risk of hypostasizing the present state of affairs and preclude its criticism. With the emphasis on knowledge, the results of science supposedly substantiate claims of value that are already largely accepted; with the emphasis on value, claims are said to be wholly independent of factual knowledge and thus seemingly have no check upon them other than their coherence with other values.

Dewey seeks the middle ground between these extremes, attending to the way in which we critically engage with our beliefs, and sees no reason why the sciences cannot provide an appropriate model. He takes the practices of developing and testing knowledge in the natural sciences to exemplify the process through which we critically develop our beliefs, and contends that if we attend to the methods involved, we need not simply defer to the results of particular inquiries as authoritative over our other concerns, even though we

cannot treat such results as irrelevant to the veracity of our values.

Although he takes inquiries in the natural sciences to be paradigmatic of knowledge acquisition, it would be a misunderstanding to think this position implies that science has a monopoly on knowledge. He says that although “physical inquiry has been taken as typical of the nature of knowing”, this claim “would be misinterpreted if it were taken to mean that science is the only valid kind of knowledge” (QC: 200). This is not to say that he considers there to be a wholly separate realm of non-scientific knowledge, but is rather that knowledge can be found outside of the laboratory too and, further, that the test of such purported knowledge is *not* whether it can be construed in terms of the theories of the special sciences but whether it can resolve problems. Although in the abstract this claim is unhelpful and ‘problem’ is admittedly a technical term to be elaborated, if one is looking to find a place for pragmatism in Dewey’s thought, one could do worse than find it in this context. He sees himself to be providing “a theory in which knowing and doing are intimately connected with each other” (171). Accordingly, his epistemology takes the form of a theory of inquiry, which he identifies as “the life-blood of every science and ... constantly employed in every art, craft and profession” (LTI: 12).

What makes science worthy of special consideration is not an ontological privilege – its descriptions do not exhaust reality.³ The importance of scientific methods of inquiry is epistemic, albeit in a qualified sense. What makes the physical sciences worth special consideration is that their methods exemplify “an intensified form of knowing in which are written large the essential characters of any knowing” (QC: 200). ‘Science’ on his account primarily refers to a way of engaging with beliefs and is not inherently limited to particular domains and subjects. Dewey suggests that “were we to define science ... as a knowledge that accrues when methods are employed which deal competently with problems that present themselves, the physician, engineer, artist, craftsman, [could] lay claim to scientific

³ Dewey rhetorically pushes the ontological point “There is something both ridiculous and disconcerting in the way in which men have let themselves be imposed upon, so as to infer that scientific ways of thinking of objects give the inner reality of things, and that they put a mark of spuriousness upon all other ways of thinking of them, and of perceiving and enjoying them” (QC: 135).

knowing” (QC: 159).

That scientific knowledge has often been primarily, if not exclusively, identified with theoretical matters has obscured the knowledge that operates in technology and other practices. Although science is often so understood, this is not the only available option. Dewey suggests that if we emphasize its method there is a pregnant and undeniable sense in which we find knowledge outside of these fields (and, of course, in them too). As Larry Hickman has argued throughout his career, despite Dewey’s repeated lauding of science and the scientific method, his philosophy is not scientistic.⁴ This feature is largely the consequence of Dewey’s emphasis on scientific methods over their results. In taking this approach, Dewey avoids the requirement that all genuine problems be reducible to the terms and theories of particular sciences. Although the conceptual resources of the sciences can undoubtedly provide means to resolve problems in other fields, as there is an important and undeniable link between science and technology, it should be unsurprising when a theory of chemical reactions, for example, has nothing to tell us about how to organize society, nor should the lack of such a connection cause us to doubt the reality of problems in either domain.

Having defused the worry about scientism, it is equally worthwhile to briefly discuss Dewey’s commitment to ‘naturalism.’ No less than his invocation of science, ‘naturalism’ caused misunderstanding in his own time. This problem has only been exacerbated by contemporary associations of the term with Neodarwinism and cognitive science.⁵ Understanding Dewey’s use of the term is crucial for appreciating the purpose behind his account of scientific inquiry and will provide necessary qualification regarding some of the terminology that I employ when describing the pattern of inquiry.

For Dewey, the commitment to naturalism is little more than a denial of supernaturalism. When contrasted with understandings of the term that imply explanatory reduction, Dewey’s

⁴ See “Pragmatism, Technology, and Scientism” in *Pragmatism: From Progressivism to Postmodernism*.

⁵ Jerome Popp’s *Naturalizing Philosophy of Education* and *Darwin’s First Philosopher* are an interesting case because these works mistakenly assume that because Dewey derived important philosophical implications from Darwin’s work, he would have been therefore committed to a reductive project that elaborates cognition in the terms described by contemporary cognitive science.

sense of the term is mild, although not inert.⁶ Early in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, he explains the requirement of naturalism as follows: “If one denies the supernatural, then one has the intellectual responsibility of indicating how the logical [i.e., inquiry and thought] may be connected with the biological in a process of continuous development” (LTI: 32). As one of the major theses of this book is to understand inquiry as a natural phenomenon, he felt obliged to devote two introductory chapters to “naturalism”, wherein he shows how the behaviours involved in inquiry are “continuous” with more “basic” biological processes.

This thesis on the biological and cultural matrices of inquiry easily lends itself to misinterpretation. For Richard Rorty, this element of Dewey’s thought betrays an unfortunate panpsychism.⁷ Jerome Popp’s book *Darwin’s First Philosopher: Dewey and the Continuity of Nature* presents Dewey’s idea of the connection between inquiry and basic biological processes as evidence as that he was an optimistic kind of Neo-Darwinist who viewed knowledge as something to which humans are naturally inclined and endowed. In response to Rorty’s worry about panpsychism we should note that ‘continuity’ does not imply the subsumption of intelligent behaviour to organic (or even inorganic) activities more generally, however much Dewey emphasizes their integration. In response to Popp’s assimilation of Dewey to “evolutionary epistemology” we should remember that Dewey was not only acutely aware of the fact that we frequently fail to employ our best standards of reasoned consideration, but also that our present means of acquiring and testing beliefs are often inadequate to the problems at hand. He thus made explicit statements that run contrary to attempts to read him as claiming that humans have evolved to be knowers. It is rather the case that “intelligence is a quality of some acts, those which are directed; and directed action is an achievement not an original endowment” (QC: 196). Intelligence, when it is found, is an achievement – one that requires cultivation and development.

Although these worries of scientism are unwarranted, they result from a genuine problem in Dewey’s discussion of the continuity of inquiry with biology. He not only framed this

⁶ The work of Joseph Margolis criticizes the tendency to treat pragmatism as committed to reductive ‘naturalism.’

⁷ See “Dewey Between Hegel and Darwin” in the volume *Truth and Progress*.

discussion in a way that lent itself to interpretation as an evolutionary epistemology. The problem was exacerbated by his use of starkly biological terms when describing the process of inquiry. He took it as required that if inquiry and thought are to be understood as natural (rather than supernatural) phenomena, such an account becomes necessary. However, he resisted the temptation to take an account of ‘the natural foundations of knowledge’ to imply the reduction of intelligent behaviours – e.g. inquiry – to more basic biological functions.

Despite his claim that the habits involved in inquiry cannot be ‘reduced’ to adaptive behaviour, he considered an account of the biological and cultural “matrices” of inquiry to have important implications for his broader theory. Perhaps unexpectedly, he considers an account of ‘the natural foundations of knowledge’ to provide grounds for resisting psychologism – the thesis that logic is in some sense concerned with psychological factors in reasoning and knowledge. Connecting inquiry with a broader description of organic activity, on his account, “destroys the assumption” that doubt, hypothesis, or observation are purely psychological matters that have no relevance for logic (LTI: 42). While he finds these notions crucial for an adequate account of inquiry, their meaning (for logic) derives from their role in inquiry rather than psychology. As he claims in a related context, “I doubt whether there exists anything that may be called *thought* as a strictly psychical existence. But it is not necessary to go into that question here. For even if there be such a thing, it does not determine the meaning of ‘thought’ for logic” (LTI: 29).

Perhaps this claim is at first glance unsatisfactory. However, his attitude towards the role of these seemingly psychological factors can be elaborated through understanding his use of biological terminology. To be sure, he provides an account of how the habits involved in inquiry are continuous with organic behaviour more generally. Yet his expectation that any account that reduces inquiry to habit would be inappropriate suggests a nuanced use of biological terms (30). In short, his stated position is that inquiry *uses* biological factors; they are “constituents” of inquiry (30). Taking this claim seriously implies no more than that the provided account of inquiry is an embodied and, upon further elaboration, an encultured activity. Hence, while biological and psychological elements play a role in the account, they

do not play a reductive, justificatory role. He avoids falling prey to the problems associated with psychologism when he claims “scientific method is, in one aspect, a technique for making a productive use of doubt by converting it into operations of definite inquiry” (QC: 182). As a merely psychological occurrence, however, doubt lacks epistemic significance.

2.2 Inquiry

Dewey’s theory of inquiry begins by considering what he calls ‘situations.’ He uses this term to refer to the numerous and interrelated ways in which an organism is implicated in its environment. He negatively defines this term as follows: “What is designated by the word ‘situation’ is not a single object or event or set of objects and events. For we never experience nor form judgments about objects and events in isolation, but only in connection with a contextual whole” (LTI: 72). Perception, to use one of Dewey’s favourite examples, is not simply a passive appreciation of the world. Sight, hearing, and taste are processes that involve many integrated factors. In eating an apple, for example, our situation includes not only the apple and our teeth and tongues, but also the complex physical, chemical, and biological processes involved in metabolizing the apple.

Perhaps we have started from banal and seemingly irrelevant considerations, but these are important for Dewey because inquiry is one form of response to what he calls an indeterminate situation. What makes a situation indeterminate is its meaning – it does not obviously indicate one response over another. If I find myself afflicted by flu-like symptoms, its occurrence would be indeterminate insofar as an appropriate response is lacking or unclear. While Dewey considers indeterminate situations to be antecedent conditions of inquiry, they are not sufficient. After all, if my response to my symptoms is simply lie down or take generic medication in the hope that the symptoms will subside, no inquiry has been carried out. I just follow habit, the opposite of inquiry.

Inquiry only begins once an indeterminate situation is taken to be problematic. This is to say that the indeterminacy of our response becomes a matter for concern. Dewey calls this first step in inquiry the ‘institution of a problem.’ Of course, to identify a given situation as

problematic does little to solve the problem, nor does it take inquiry very far. Nonetheless, without such a determination, when confronted by such situations our response might best be characterized as indifference or, perhaps more harshly in some cases, delusion.

Once a situation has been identified as problematic, i.e. as requiring inquiry, the next step is to determine the nature of the problem through observation. Continuing the example of flu-like symptoms, without knowledge of further conditions surrounding the situation one remains unsure how to proceed. As mere symptoms, their occurrence does not suggest a precise means of resolving the problem. However, considering my affliction to be a case of malaria, for example, suggests certain possible causes and therefore resolutions. As a hypothesis, malaria suggests that blood tests would reveal the presence of certain parasites. If so, then treatments of chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine would be discovered to be appropriate.

These considerations amount to the claim that while appropriate response to the situation is unknown at the beginning of inquiry, through observation one attempts to determine the elements of the situation in a way that provides insight into the nature of the problem. Problems, insofar as they are situated, do not occur without conditions, whether natural, social, psychological, or something else, and not all conditions are of equal importance. To this extent, observation is not a mere taking in of the situation, but demands active engagement in order to determine the relevance of factors.

If factors relevant to the problem are not immediately apparent, then observation might take the form of troubleshooting. Troubleshooting – isolating and varying the conditions of the situation – is a fruitful way of elaborating Dewey's notion of observation because it is a clear case in which the relevant factors of the situation are determined by means of interacting with and manipulating the environment. Through troubleshooting one determines the relevance of elements by observing the consequences that action upon these elements have with respect to the problem. However, a shortcoming of leaning too heavily on troubleshooting as an example is that it is often a last resort – a brute-force method that occurs in lieu of observation motivated by specific hypotheses.

Careful observation of the situation is critical because the way a problem is specified determines which “specific suggestions are entertained and which are dismissed; what data are selected and which rejected,” making the statement of the problem “the criterion for relevancy and irrelevancy of hypotheses and conceptual structures” (LTI: 112). Entertaining the possibility that one’s symptoms are malarial rather than an ordinary case of flu implicates different factors in the situation. Additionally, prior knowledge is of decisive importance in such observation, as it was not until malaria was understood to have parasitic origins that the relevance and importance of mosquitos, still water, and the evidential weight of blood tests could be fully appreciated.

As the way in which one identifies a problem suggests potentially relevant data to be observed, the next step is to determine possible solutions – possible courses of action with respect to the situation. If blood tests have determined that my symptoms are indeed a case of malaria, then a range of treatments might be appropriate. However, the specific treatment for my case would depend on how advanced my case is – determined through examining blood to observe the species and stage of the parasite. The consequences of a diagnosis don’t end with the treatment, as prevention requires additional action. For instance, the use of pesticides and draining of swamps would help control the mosquito population and reduce the recurrence and spread of the disease. Even the initial meaning of ‘malaria’ as “bad air” suggested some preventative measures such as “closing windows at night, which had some influence on the actual production of the disease” (429).

As problems and observed conditions often suggest numerous possible resolutions, the next step of inquiry is to assess the viability of such hypotheses. Although it is unlikely that there can be a general account of how ideas ‘pop’ into our heads, Dewey thinks there is at least something to be said about the development or assessment of hypotheses, which is achieved through reasoning – the evaluation of proposals for resolving the problematic situation.⁸ If I have allergies to certain anti-malarial drugs, or have been infected with a

⁸ “The occurrence of suggestions,” Dewey considers to be beyond the scope of inquiry because this is ultimately “a brute fact, alogical. It happens or it doesn’t” (MW13: 66).

drug-resistant species of parasite, these factors would play a decisive role in determining appropriate courses of treatment. Both cases would set limitations to the drug regimen required, as well as demand varying degrees of medical supervision during my treatment.

Dewey is resolute that thought should be understood in terms of inquiry, and not the other way around. This is, in part, an attempt to stave off charges of psychologism. It is equally, and more importantly, part of his insistence that thought should not be understood as something merely subjective, but is, at least in its fullest and most important sense, a way of engaging with the world. Thus, although he describes the impetus of inquiry as the recognition of situations as problematic – our response in the face of these being doubtful – he nonetheless complains that “the commonest fallacy is to suppose that since the state of doubt is accompanied by a feeling of uncertainty, knowledge arises when this feeling gives way to one of assurance” (QC: 181). While being assured in one’s actions is to be preferred in many cases, such certainty is no guarantee that this attitude is warranted. He thus claims that “if we define ‘mental’ through exclusion of overt acts that terminate in a changed environment, nothing merely mental can actually resolve doubt or clarify confusion” (185). A problem can be resolved by thought, but only on the condition that ‘thought’ is understood to involve an active engagement with environing conditions and is not limited to prior deliberation about possible courses of action.

It should be apparent that for Dewey reasoning is not the whole of inquiry but rather only one part of it. However much reasoning or deliberation we engage in before deciding which hypothesis should be acted upon, it is only once a hypothesis is tested that we can determine its actual consequences. Although I hypothesize that certain anti-malarials will resolve my infection, the expectation on its own certainly does not guarantee that events will unfold as anticipated. Perhaps the parasite is unexpectedly drug-resistant or even a new species, in which case the course of treatment might not have the intended effect. So long as my problem remains, further inquiry is called for. It is only once the initial problem is resolved that inquiry rightfully comes to an end. This resolution occurs through changing the conditions that made the original situation problematic.

Perhaps inquiry as described seems thoroughly uninteresting and banal. In some ways this is the point, as Dewey is interested in demystifying appeals to science and knowledge by showing that they operate in quite familiar, even banal ways. On his rendering, we deploy our present conceptual resources in the course of responding to problems, but through this use these resources themselves become amenable to development and revision. The account of inquiry is thus both descriptive and normative because, although the intent of the account is to describe the practices by which knowledge is best developed, it is the success of results in the resolution of future problems that determines the long-term worth of a knowledge claim.

While Dewey distinguishes his own ambitions in the theory of inquiry from those of what he calls “epistemology”, it is unclear what his intended contrast involves. His discussion of inquiry would have certainly been aided by a more thorough treatment of his account of what he calls “the method of science” in contrast to other purported epistemologies. One major feature that he can be pinned down on is the view that an account of inquiry should be capable of standing on its own – in his words, an account of knowledge should be ‘autonomous’. By this, he means that such practices should be capable of self-correction and can be justified without appeal to standards beyond inquiry itself.

This autonomy of inquiry links anti-foundationalism and fallibilism. For Dewey, to reject epistemological foundations is to reject the notion of external constraints upon our practices of inquiry. This means that norms external to inquiry are insufficient for determining and justifying how inquiries are best carried out, whether such norms are supposedly provided by psychology, evolutionary biology, or something more distinctly philosophical, such as the philosophy of mind, or even an Aristotelean account of human nature. Such accounts, as foundations for knowledge, purport to provide general criteria for assessing whether particular claims to knowledge (or methods of acquiring it) are worthy of the title, e.g. the Humean story of ‘testing’ an idea by tracing it back to its sensory origins. Dewey places his account of inquiry in stark contrast to such foundational appeals by contending that if a procedure for developing knowledge is any good we should expect it to have mechanisms

that enable self-test and refinement. Norms independent of inquiry – ones that are immune to critical engagement yet set limits to it – problematically imply that inquiry is incapable of self-regulation.

Dewey expresses a similar distrustful attitude with respect to notions of truth. Although he does not eliminate the concept, as opponents of pragmatism often claim, he holds a deflationist attitude towards truth, as appeals to ‘the truth of the matter’ are no substitute for the tentative and hypothetical results of competent inquiry. As he puts the point, “the scientist finds no help in determining the probable truth of some proposed theory by comparing it with a standard of absolute truth and immutable being. He has to rely upon definite operations undertaken under definite conditions – upon method” (QC: 211).

Yet, contrary to certain renderings of anti-foundationalist views (e.g. coherentism), Deweyan inquiry is not a recipe for insulating certain results. His account provides a way to make the justificatory circle a virtuous one.⁹ To elaborate his position, he uses the example of metallurgy. Metallurgical practice, he claims, is subject to norms that have themselves been developed and refined through the practice of processing ore. “There were needs to be satisfied; consequences to be reached. As they were reached, new needs and new possibilities opened to view and old processes were re-made to satisfy them” (LTI: 14). To bring this example to bear on practices of inquiry, what makes an account of inquiry a good one is to be determined by its results with respect to ongoing practices of inquiry. Or, as Dewey puts the point, a good method of inquiry is, minimally, one that “yields results that are either confirmed in further inquiry or that are corrected by use of the same procedures” (21). A good method of inquiry is also one that can be fruitfully employed to resolve problematic situations.

It should be uncontroversial to claim that the practices of inquiry Dewey lauds are fallibilistic. However, it is worth elaborating how he takes fallibility to enter into the discussion. He frames this in terms of a condition of competency. While there is perhaps nothing incoherent in the notion of an infallibilist account of inquiry, such a practice would not only

⁹ Hilary Putnam has suggested that a better metaphor is that justification is spiral (1990, 304).

overestimate our capacities but would hypostasized specific results, placing them beyond critical attention, and there is good reason to be wary of that. Anticipating Feyerabend but without giving up on the notion of method, Dewey is happy to acknowledge that there comes a time when previously fixed terms of inquiry, whether specific results or the practices themselves, need to be opened up to scrutiny. Thus, an important implication of Dewey's call to be 'scientific' about our beliefs is to acknowledge that "the 'settlement of a particular situation by a particular inquiry is no guarantee that *that* settled conclusion will always remain settled" (LTI: 16). Taking the settlement of problems as invariably tentative, in scientific inquiries "the criterion of what is taken to be settled, or to be knowledge, is being *so* settled that it is available as a resource in further inquiry; not being settled in such a way as not to be subject to revision in further inquiry" (16). Properly functioning practices of inquiry treat results as terms which suggest further avenues of inquiry to be explored, rather than terms to which all future inquiries must uncritically and inevitably accommodate themselves.¹⁰ Instead, his view is that "there is no such thing as a final settlement [of a problematic situation], because every settlement introduces the conditions of some degree of a new unsettling" (42). It therefore remains an open question whether our present stock of beliefs and concepts will be adequate to cases we encounter in the future, or even whether our present methods of inquiry will be adequate to resolve particular problematic situations.

Having provided an account of Dewey's theory of inquiry, as well as having drawn out some of its features that are particularly relevant for his eventual politics and ethics, we are now in a position to turn to one of the crucial uses to which Dewey puts it; namely, the extension of this account of inquiry to problems of value.

2.3 Value

In *The Politics of John Dewey*, Gary Bullert contends that "Dewey's philosophy stands or falls on the ability of science to be applied to moral judgments" (1983, 11). Of course, given that

¹⁰ This account of revisability contrasts with Karl Popper's famous statement of falsifiability, according to which fallibility is a characteristic of properly scientific hypotheses. For Dewey, fallibility is a condition of competent inquiry and he sees no need to go beyond this basis to make this point.

‘science’ has been appealed to when justifying or implementing problematic values through eugenics, for example, there is good reason for contemporary thinkers to be wary of such declarations. However, when discussing the viability of a scientific ethics, Dewey is not committing himself to any of the projects traditionally associated with such rhetoric. His claim is that the model of inquiry exemplified by the sciences can and should be extended to problems of value. In fact, he finds it to be a great shame that “the attitude involved in it [science], its method, has not as yet gone far beyond its own precincts” (QC: 200). As well, he contends that its methods of problem-solving have rarely been expanded to matters of value.

Yet as not all inquiries are scientific, the demands of his stated position remain unclear. Dewey’s own rhetoric surrounding science and what makes scientific inquiries unique varies. His various characterizations, although interrelated, place differing demands on the extension of his theory of inquiry to ethical matters. The primary contrast he makes is between scientific inquiries and those of common sense.¹¹ The inquiries of common sense are distinct from those of science to the extent that they are primarily concerned with the practical (rather than theoretical) resolution of problems, which places different requirements on how hypotheses are to be framed. In the case of science, he considers hypotheses to be abstracted from particular cultural and individual purposes: the resolution of problems requires broader coherence with established scientific conclusions, rather than treating each problem and its resolution as a singular affair. A further condition is found in the demand that hypotheses be framed in order to facilitate future lines of inquiry, especially in aiding future observation.

At times Dewey characterizes scientific inquiry in terms of the kinds of problems that it attempts to resolve. He takes part of the success of scientific inquiry to result from the fact that its problems are largely informed by theories which are themselves the results of

¹¹ This distinction, however, should not be understood as absolute because he considers these to be integrated: “(1) Scientific subject-matter and procedures grow out of the direct problems and methods of common sense, of practical uses and enjoyments, and (2) react into the latter in a way that enormously refines, expands and liberates the contents and the agencies at the disposal of common sense” (LTI: 71–2).

prior inquiries. These, in turn, set particular terms for problems as well as provide advanced conceptual resources along with technologies that are designed for purposes of inquiry, the language of chemistry and the CERN supercollider being examples. In this way, scientific inquiry, he claims, has a progressive quality that other inquiries often lack.

Having taxonomized some of the meanings that ‘science’ holds in Dewey’s thought, it should be clear that not all of these are fully appropriate to the question of value. Thus, we might ask which of these criteria is the one to be emphasized. Yet at first glance, it may appear that the initial distinction between common sense and science is unhelpful in the context of values because there is an important sense in which ethical problems are inescapably cultural. We might ask therefore whether the appeal to ‘science’ in matters of value is possible at all. Gregory Pappas goes so far as to claim that “the tendency to understand Dewey’s ethics through science seems overstated and perhaps unwarranted. He used science as an analogy or as an exemplar” (1997, 523). Pappas’ skepticism is warranted to a point. However, given the frequency of Dewey’s invocations of the ‘scientific method’ and his repeated claim that this way of engaging with beliefs needs to be cultivated for democratic life, there is good *prima facie* reason to take these claims seriously. These invocations also suggest that a minimal, albeit important, sense in which Dewey connects ethics with his theory of knowledge can be found in his appeals to methodology. This commitment, I argue, shapes his view on ethics and I will sketch some important features of that view in order to substantiate his claim that ethical discourse should be treated as no less fallible and open to debate than any other.

Dewey makes his most explicit statement of the connection between epistemology and ethics in a chapter of *The Quest for Certainty* entitled “The Construction of the Good”. He introduces this chapter with a perhaps cynical observation:

beliefs about values are pretty much in the position in which beliefs about nature were before the scientific revolution. There is either a basic distrust of the capacity of experience to develop its own regulative standards, and an appeal to what philosophers call eternal values ... or there is acceptance of enjoyments already experienced irrespective of the method or operation by which they are brought into existence. (QC: 204)

The invocation of “eternal” values is certainly out of date. However, given the account of inquiry described above, such ‘immutability’ can be understood as the more familiar position that values are not properly amenable to processes of empirical inquiry or experience and cannot be justified on either basis. The earlier discussion of inquiry and knowledge should be sufficient for understanding why Dewey rejects this option. More interesting is his engagement with what ordinarily passes as an empirical account of value and valuation.

Consider the attitude that some meta-ethical theorists have toward value; for example, advocates of emotivism and other forms of expressivism, according to which claims of value are ultimately reducible to statements of preference. Dewey characterizes the view as follows: “Disagreement about what is good or bad is ... of the nature of a difference in tastes. To call something a good or positive value is one way of saying, ‘I like it,’ as in another area I may like oysters: to call it bad is not to make an objective statement, but a statement about one’s personal and subjective attitudes” (LW11: 462). Critics often note that if one takes such a position it seems to leave little room for a normative ethics because preferences are something brute – something about which there is nothing more to be said; we either have them or we don’t. It would be ridiculous to claim that somebody who doesn’t like oysters is in the wrong. If the emotivist is right in contending that value claims are ultimately no more than matters of taste, then disputes about value become insoluble.

Dewey’s critique of immediate experience and its role in epistemology provides an illuminating parallel for appreciating what he takes to be problematic in such a view, and simultaneously helps to motivate his proposed solution. He repeatedly insists upon the difference between having an experience and given experiences being of cognitive significance. His disagreement with the notion of immediate knowledge, i.e. the thesis that empirical claims are warranted to the extent that they rest upon immediate, non-inferential awareness of percepts or sense-data, is that this reduction seemingly construes all experience as being inherently cognitive – its bare occurrence tantamount to cases of knowledge.¹²

¹² If one is worried that this view is nothing more than an outdated stereotype, then consider Laurence Bonjour’s recent discussions of the topic.

Rightly or wrongly, Dewey's oft-repeated critique of British empiricism is that it fails to draw this crucial distinction between having an experience and its cognitive significance, ultimately treating all experience as being of the cognitive kind. In contrast, Dewey's view of experience is that whether the world appears to us in thus and such a way is not itself a cognitive matter; it is simply a brute event. Developing this claim in *Experience and Nature*, he contends that "a bare event is no event at all; something happens. What that something is, is found out by actual study" (EN: 13). It is only once experiences are taken as significant – as data relevant to a problem – that cognition enters the picture. However, to place experience in this context carries inevitable fallibility alongside it: the significance of a given experience is itself a matter to be discovered by acting in light of it as a hypothesis. He considers this attitude towards experience to be a crucial part of what it means to be 'scientific': "The scientific revolution came about when material of direct and uncontrolled experience was taken as problematic; as supplying material to be transformed by reflective operations into known objects" (QC: 207).

One finds a similar distinction at work in Dewey's account of preferences and values. He motivates his understanding of the requirements of an adequate ethical theory in terms of what should be a truism: the difference between something being valued and something being *valuable*; or, if you prefer, the descriptive and normative dimensions of judgment. A claim about what is valued states nothing more than an isolated fact: "If one likes a thing he likes it; that *is* a point about which there can be no dispute" (210). Yet, to say something is *valuable* or *likeable* is, he insists, to put forward a claim that calls for justification.

While Dewey readily concedes that there is a sense in which preferences are brute and indisputable, he sees the normative problem as arising when preferences are claimed to be worthy of endorsement. "By way of self-justification and 'rationalization,' an enjoyment creates a tendency to assert that the thing enjoyed is a value. This assertion of validity adds authority to the fact" (210). Such a claim may be hasty and problematic as a mere assertion but it is a starting point for moral valuation.

The view thus described shares important similarities with what Simon Blackburn calls

‘ethical anti-realism.’ Blackburn’s “Errors and the Phenomenology of Value” is a response to J. L. Mackie’s ‘error theory’ of ethics. On Mackie’s controversial view, all ethical claims are ultimately false for the simple reason that they imply the objectivity of values, yet there is no such thing as an ethical fact. In response to this challenge, Blackburn concedes that moral values are ‘our construction’, but contends that sufficient objectivity can be achieved through our practices of articulating and justifying our preferences. He claims that “as soon as one *uses* a sentence whose simple assertion expresses an attitude, one is in the business of discussing or voicing ethical opinion” (1997, 173). To this extent one opens up one’s values to rationalization and articulation and they become amenable to justification.

While Blackburn’s idea is similar to Dewey’s there are also crucial differences. Most important is that Dewey’s account of rationalization is not to be understood purely in terms of the “forms of speech that communicate [moral values], challenge them, refine them, and abandon them.” (174). Like Blackburn, Dewey’s recommendation is to put moral deliberation at the forefront of ethical theory. But for Dewey, moral evaluation demands more than speech-acts, and these demands are provided by his account of inquiry. On his account, determining whether something valued is *really* valuable isn’t merely to be in a position to say things in its defence, to rationalize it and engage with the reasons of others. There is a crucial experimental and empirical component to the identification of the properly valuable. Dewey enumerates the differences between the descriptive and normative dimensions of value-claims:

To say that something satisfies is to report something as an isolated finality. To assert that it is *satisfactory* is to define it in its connections and interactions. ... It involves a prediction; it contemplates a future in which the thing will continue to serve; it *will* do. It asserts a consequence the thing will actively institute; it will *do*. That it is satisfying is the content of a proposition of fact; that it is satisfactory is a judgment, an estimate, an appraisal. It denotes an attitude *to be* taken, that of striving to perpetuate and to make secure. (QC: 208)

Although this passage is dense, the importance of moral judgment is clear and repeatedly claimed to be crucial. It is in light of these features of moral judgment that Dewey considers his account of inquiry to be particularly well suited to questions of value. Indeed, he goes so

far as to claim that value judgments that are arrived at by inquiry “are the sole alternative to the domination of belief by impulse, chance, blind habit and self-interest” (QC: 209), because “as long as we do not engage in this inquiry enjoyments [i.e., preferences] ... are casual; they are given by ‘nature,’ not constructed by art” (212).

Even if there is a brute sense in which we simply have certain preferences, Dewey considers there to be a decisive difference between these and the values that are reflected upon, refined, and can be maintained in light of critical and experimental practices of inquiry.¹³ He uses the example of taste to elaborate this position: “Expertness of taste is at once the result and the reward of constant exercise of thinking. Instead of there being no disputing about tastes, they are the one thing worth disputing about, if by ‘dispute’ is signified discussion involving reflective inquiry” (209). While a requirement of critical reflection is clear, such reflection alone does not establish the importance of the connection Dewey draws between values and experimental inquiry. He elaborates this link by paralleling his claims about values with considerations from his broader epistemology: “Heat experienced as a consequence of directed operations”, he maintains, “has a meaning quite different from the heat that is casually experienced without knowledge of how it came about. The same is true of enjoyments” (213). The parallel is more fully developed in Dewey’s near-definition that “[an] enjoyment becomes a value when we discover the relations upon which its presence depends” (207).

If it is the knowledge of “relations” that constitutes the difference between mere preferences and the values that are the proper domain of ethics, one might wonder what relations (elsewhere described as “connections” or “interactions”) could possibly be relevant to this subject. Further, although the language of discovery Dewey invokes suggests the importance of inquiry for value, it does not substantiate his claims for the necessity of such inquiry. The response to both of these concerns is found in Dewey’s account of moral ends. Steven Fesmire considers Dewey’s critique of most other moral theories to be of interest because

¹³ Christine McCarthy describes this view as follows: “reflected-upon goods are indeed ‘better than’ those goods experienced as values, but not reflected upon. And the better and more reliable is the process of reflection, the better are the values produced” (1999, 348).

of his charge that “moral philosophers have abstracted one or another factor of moral life as the central one and then treated it as a foundational source of moral justification to which all morality is reducible” (2003, 56). In line with Dewey’s anti-foundational and fallibilist account of inquiry, he explicitly and repeatedly denies the viability of a notion of a singular “Good” around which moral theorizing is to be framed. As we will see, he finds this approach to ethics not only to imply an inadequate account of moral deliberation, but also to be insufficiently pluralistic insofar as singular ends are taken to be the sole criteria for action.

Dewey repudiates the idea of singular and ultimate ends when dismissing the hackneyed precept ‘the ends justify the means’. “Not *the* end – in the singular” he claims, “justifies the means; for there is no such thing as the single all-important end” (HNC: 158). An end could only justify the means of its attainment if we treat the means as wholly irrelevant and independent of the worth of the chosen end, as if we *already* know that some end, to the radical exclusion of any others, can make the question of means a matter of minor concern. Further, to treat means as a matter of secondary concern relegates the role of moral deliberation to the mere determination of instrumental efficiency. The question whether a given end is legitimate is beyond the purview of such reasoning.

On Dewey’s account, assuming that the deliberation involved in ethics is nothing more than determining which path to take in order to secure already determined goods, yields an inadequate account of thought’s importance for value. “An aim not framed on the basis of a survey of those present conditions which are to be employed as means of its realization simply throws us back upon past habits” (160). When confronted by a genuine moral dilemma, it is precisely the inadequacy of past habits and established values that are at stake. Insofar as the situation is problematic, our present values (i.e., our ends) are inadequate as they fail to yield a clear or adequate response. To treat our ends or values as already wholly determined and isolated from the question of means insulates them from critical engagement and development in the face of the very dilemmas to which they give rise.

Dewey introduces his notion of ‘ends-in-view’ to clarify his account of the role of ends (or values) in moral deliberation. This notion contrasts with what are typically called ‘ends-

in-themselves'. Dewey introduces this distinction, in part, to emphasize that ends-in-view are the most important stakes of moral deliberation, while at the same time noting that such ends are *taken* to be good, but only hypothetically. As we have seen, Dewey dismisses the idea of ends-in-themselves for the reason that the concept suggests that the values of importance for moral deliberation are already known and unproblematic, a presumption that runs contrary to fallibilism. Further, this notion suggests that there are certain things that are unequivocally good – worthy of pursuit regardless of consequences or circumstances. The problem with this account of ends arises in the context of moral deliberation because, practically speaking, “the doctrine of fixed ends not only diverts attention from examination of consequences and the intelligent creation of purpose, but, since means and ends are two ways of regarding the same actuality, it also renders men careless in their inspection of existing conditions” (HNC: 160).

By this point it should be clear that Dewey is firmly a consequentialist with respect to values. However, because of his critique of ultimate and singular moral ends, this is a qualified consequentialism.¹⁴ Like other consequentialists, such as utilitarians, Dewey insists that the empirical question of available means and potential and actual consequences inevitably enters into moral deliberation. However, unlike utilitarianism, he does not think that ends can be reduced to a singular good, such as the vacuous ‘happiness’, nor that such a singular, highest end is required for moral deliberation. In fact, he finds the very idea harmful for ethical thought: it presumes that there is a single standard by which all consequences are to be judged, leading to ethical myopia. “It is willful folly to fasten upon some single end or consequence which is liked, and permit the view of that to blot from perception all other undesired and undesirable consequences” (157–8). Available means and the consequences of their use provide grounds for criticizing the ends to which we direct our actions: insofar as they are integrated, means and ends are best treated in light of their interrelation. The Deweyan picture of moral deliberation is thus complicated because

¹⁴ James Johnson and Jack Knight consider Dewey to be committed to a ‘tempered consequentialism’ because it is “a brand of consequentialism that is constrained or tempered by awareness of the conditions under which consequences are produced” (2011, 18).

“ends are, in fact, literally endless, forever coming into existence as new activities as occasion new consequences. ‘Endless ends’ is a way of saying that there are no ends – that is no fixed self-enclosed finalities” (HNC: 159). Although Dewey sometimes spoke of ‘growth’ as the ultimate moral and political end, this claim is misleading because it makes it seem as though a substantive notion of growth is being treated as the test of whether a moral or political inquiry has been successful, rather than growth being a happy side-effect of competent methods and institutions.¹⁵

Successful moral inquiry, on this picture, is primarily a matter of determining the best course of action with respect to the various values we have, a process which simultaneously makes our values open to scrutiny. The idea that we can permanently rank our values against one another, however, such as Bentham hoped for with his notion of happiness, is chimerical. Dewey denounces this possibility as not only misguided, but potentially problematic. “To suppose that we can make a hierarchical table of values at large once for all, a kind of catalogue in which they are arranged in an order of ascending or descending worth, is to indulge in a gloss on our inability to frame intelligent judgments in the concrete. Or else it is to dignify customary choice and prejudice by a title of honour” (QC: 212). As with the case of ends-in-themselves, to take a hierarchical attitude towards values risks throwing us back upon the very stock of accepted ends which, in the face of moral dilemmas, are revealed to be inadequate. To be sure, such intellectual activity might be helpful for purposes of clarity and consistency in our moral commitments; however, it is no substitute for moral deliberation and inquiry.

For Dewey, the rightness of a course of action is to be understood in terms of how well our various values and the consequences involved in their fulfillment can be balanced against one another. However, this balance does not imply that there must be a uniquely warranted course of action. The view of moral inquiry that he elaborates in methodological terms is best understood as the more moderate claim of a strategy for resolving problems. In fact,

¹⁵ Robert Talisse, among others, takes Dewey to be committed to such a notion of growth. I criticize this reading in more detail in chapter 5.

Dewey is explicit that the resolution of problems is the goal, not only of moral inquiry but of science too. “If the measure of knowledge is the quality of intelligence manifested in dealing with problems presented by any experienced subject-matter, the ... question always at issue is the possibility of developing a method adequate to cope with problems” (QC: 172). To this extent he sees no reason not to talk about moral knowledge as ‘scientifically’ achieved insofar as we deploy experimental methods to resolve moral problems. The question of central importance for a ‘scientific’ ethics becomes whether approaching moral deliberation in terms of experimentation can be successfully employed to resolve moral problems.

Dewey is, however, explicit that if one is looking for a method in the sense of a decision-procedure which will unambiguously resolve all moral issues, one will be disappointed. If instead one reads his claims for scientific ethics as a proposed strategy of navigating moral problems, then Dewey considers there to be a good deal to be said regarding moral inquiry. His suggestion is that that intelligently (rather than arbitrarily or capriciously) to make moral decisions requires the fallibility and plurality of ends involved in experimental moral practices. In *Theory of the Moral Life* Dewey is explicit about the goals and limits of moral theory configured along the lines he advocates:

Moral theory can (i) generalize the types of moral conflicts which arise ... it can (ii) state the leading ways in which such problems have been intellectually dealt with ... it can (iii) render personal reflection more systematic, and enlightened, suggesting alternatives ... stimulating greater consistency in judgment. But it does not offer a table of commandments in a catechism in which answers are as definite as are the questions. ... The student who expects more from moral theory will be disappointed. (LW7: 166)

It is necessary to bring this discussion of Dewey’s theory of moral inquiry and how it connects with his vision of science to bear upon the question of education in democratic life. In “Dewey’s Ethics: Philosophy or Science?” Christine McCarthy applies this vision of ethics to the concrete question of how and to what extent values should be taught in public schools. She claims that on Dewey’s view, “the teaching of *accepted* values or virtues as moral truths, even in those limited cases where agreement exists, and even where that agreement does not reduce to a merely verbal assent to a set of platitudes, will tend to produce a highly

undesirable state of mind” (1999, 355). For Dewey, to treat values as already settled and beyond question is deeply problematic. It construes knowledge as demanding deference rather than active engagement.

McCarthy thus concludes that, according to a Deweyan account of ethics, to teach values independently of actual practices of moral deliberation fosters a problematic attitude towards values in students, namely, “a dogmatic fixity of belief, a cognitive state that is very poorly suited to the real requirements of public problem-solving via democratic discourse” (355). “The inculcation of this sort of fixed belief system”, she thinks, “is *not* a legitimate purpose of a public education system, not even when the belief is as important as are ethical and moral beliefs, not even when the belief system in question is widely, or even universally, held within a population” (355). Thus, for the purposes of education in a democratic society, values should not be taught as settled conclusions, but rather in terms of the methods involved in competent moral deliberation. To do otherwise risks making individuals ill-equipped to creatively resolve moral problems. As we saw above, this demands that the use of experimental attitudes and methods must be fostered for values no less than any other belief.

2.4 Education and Politics

To this point I have articulated some of the primary features of Dewey’s approach to value that follow from his epistemology. Mere preferences are on this account inadequate for valuation in its most important sense and are thus not to be treated as brute or given. Dewey takes such preferences to be no less subject than any other matters to refinement through experimental inquiry. Similarly, his view of ethical ends not only eschews appeal to ultimate criteria, but is also explicitly pluralistic in orientation to the extent that our various values are often irreducible and in conflict yet have no obvious or natural priority over one another.

It should be obvious that such an account has political implications. His account of extending ‘intelligent methods’ to problems of value inherits the anti-foundational, fallibilist, and experimental attitude toward belief that he takes to be part of what it means to

be ‘scientific’. However, what I have not done is to determine whether such a connection between epistemology and moral and political concerns is tantamount to an epistemic defence of democracy. For now I will merely elaborate how the account provided is politically non-neutral, and draw attention to some important features.

Dewey’s view of education in a democracy as (at least in part) an endeavour to develop intelligent habits in the next generation implies a particular liberal vision. In the surprisingly polemical *John Dewey and the Decline of American Education: How the Patron Saint of Schools has Corrupted Teaching and Learning*, by Henry T. Edmondston III makes an impassioned conservative response to this feature of Dewey’s project. For Dewey, education, “as the means of the general institution of intelligent action, holds the key to orderly social reconstruction. But inculcation of fixed conclusions rather than development of intelligence as a method of action still dominates its processes” (QC: 201). Edmondston sees nothing to that claim beyond outright hostility to established religious doctrine and values. As he puts the point, some argue that Dewey “simply wanted students to become more reflective, to think for themselves. But however much they might wish that were true, that is not what he promoted. Although much of what Dewey said is vague, this much is clear: If a child clings to religion, tradition, or any other inherited values, he is not thinking ‘intelligently’” (2006, 21). Edmondston finds this attitude troublesome because he thinks “Dewey’s opposition to traditional and religious ideas colours his call for the teaching of ‘objective’ critical thinking” (54). Quite bluntly, he dismisses Dewey’s view as a covert attempt to ‘educate’ children out of their religious commitments. Under the guise of ‘objectivity’, Dewey seeks to promote undeniably political ends.

If all that can be said in favour of a particular doctrine is that it is traditional, Dewey would have little sympathy toward it. However, this is not to say that his view automatically excludes any place for religious belief. Melvin L. Rogers, for instance, contends that it is incorrect to assume that Dewey’s attitude toward religion is wholly dismissive. “If we are encouraged to acknowledge the reflective contestability of our commitments, and do not read the conflicts between us and our fellow citizens as based on some darker ontological

distinction, it is unclear to me why we must presume Dewey asks us to forgo religious commitments” (2009, 242). Yet, while Dewey is in earnest when he considers religious belief to be separable from its supernatural tradition, this is a separation that many would have difficulty conceding. Thus, although Dewey’s attitude to religion is often mistakenly rendered as hostile, his demand for experimentalism nonetheless represents a potential threat to any orthodoxy.

While Dewey is not without resources for responding to charges such as that of Edmondston, it is undeniable that there is a certain liberal bias in his demand that values be open to critical development. Yet, he should not be taken as committed to the wholesale rejection of any particular belief merely because it happens to be traditional or, for that matter, religious. Instead, he attends to *how* the view in question is warranted. To the extent that Dewey objects to traditional religious doctrines such objections can be readily understood as part of his more general objection to dogmatism.

While it is clear that Dewey’s epistemology is not politically inert, the details of the political demands of his account of inquiry are far from clear. There are two readily available ways that one might render the difference between liberals and conservatives, and these yield corresponding responses to the question of whether the account detailed above can (or cannot) accommodate non-liberal views. In *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, James Davison Hunter describes the difference between liberals and conservatives – or, as he says, progressives and the orthodox – as differing views about what is “fundamentally right and wrong about the world we live in” and “what is ultimately good and what is finally intolerable in our communities” (1991, 31). Informing the respective decisions on such ultimate issues is a deep disagreement over the nature of moral authority – “the basis by which people determine whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, and so on” (42). With respect to this standard, Hunter defines the orthodox (conservative) view as involving “the commitment on the part of adherents to an external, definable, and transcendent authority” (44), whereas for ‘progressives’ (or liberals) “moral authority tends to be defined by the spirit of the modern age, a spirit of rationalism and

subjectivism” (1991, 44).

The Deweyan account of moral inquiry explicitly rules out such conservatism because “the choice is not between a moral authority outside custom and one within it. It is between adopting more or less intelligent and significant customs” (HNC: 58). If an appeal to a transcendent authority were not problematic enough, the very idea of an ultimate criterion of value is paradigmatic of an ‘unintelligent’ attitude toward moral authority as beyond experimental critique.

In *Democracy After Liberalism*, Robert Talisse describes a different sense of conservatism. On his account, the conservative “sees the liberal political program as excessive. According to the conservative, the governmental agencies and institutional apparatus necessary to secure the envisioned distribution of social goods pose a threat to freedom” (2005, 15). The distinction between Hunter and Talisse’s understandings might be rendered as a difference between moral and political conservatism.¹⁶ While a Deweyan account of value is clearly opposed to Hunter’s moral conservatives, the orientation of his thought towards Talisse’s political conservative is less obvious.

Dewey himself endorsed political liberalism, seeing the appeal to laissez-faire economics as resting upon an inadequate account not only of economic laws but scientific laws more generally. As he describes it, this view is motivated by the claim that “the laws of economics are the ‘natural’ laws of all political action ... [and] to attempt to regulate the course of economic affairs, to bring them into service of humanly conceived ends, [is] a harmful interference” (QC: 169). His objection to this idea is, however, independent of his epistemology, yet there may be some room for the political conservatives in the Deweyan account of inquiry. While their decisions on the ideals of economic policy answer to differing notions of the good than Dewey does, if both their ends and the means for their attainment can be articulated without lapsing into dogmatism, then it is unclear on what epistemological grounds the Deweyan account would rule these views out.

¹⁶ There is, of course, a kind of political conservatism that follows from the moral commitments of Hunter’s conservatives. Yet, to the extent that their politics are primarily informed by a particular vision of moral authority, this figure can be treated as distinct from the political conservatives described by Talisse.

These considerations point toward a decisive problem. There seems to be a level at which certain preferences can't admit of further inquiry. However much we might engage in inquiry, however critical and experimental we aspire to be, it seems that certain moral problems might remain insoluble. Does this possibility – the lack of ultimate ground or resolution – not serve as proof that Dewey's 'scientific' ambition for morality and politics leaves us with little more than overblown positivistic rhetoric? Dewey himself fully never addresses the problem, but we will return to this topic. For now, it is apparent that if one is to entertain his account of inquiry, value, and politics, some limits need to be acknowledged as to how far practices of inquiry can be pursued. The question then remains whether such an account is therefore revealed to be vacuous.

Melvin Rogers, for one, does not take the admission of insoluble moral and political disagreement to be a serious problem for Dewey's account. "To be sure, inquiry does seek to achieve resolution among conflicting moral claims, but Dewey acknowledges that the result of reflection may be to reveal the incommensurability of values" (2009, xi-xii). In fact, Dewey concedes that it would be overly optimistic to claim that inquiry will necessarily resolve moral and political issues "very extensively". Nonetheless, he considers habits of critical, experimental engagement with such beliefs to be in need of development for continued democratic life. He claims, "we have more knowledge than we try to put to use, and until we try more systematically we shall not know what are the important gaps in our sciences judged from the point of view of their moral and political use" (QC: 218).

In light of this contention, Dewey's claim that inquiry can be extended to social and political matters might be seen as a hypothesis – a proposal that hasn't been extensively tested and should be. Perhaps, he might concede, it could be revealed that certain values are beyond debate. But, if so, the status of such values would still be different than cases in which values are assumed to have such warrant in advance of inquiry. The viability of his view hinges on his distinction being between values casually accepted and critically reflected upon.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I substantiated Dewey's claims for the important role of education in democratic societies by detailing his account of scientific inquiry and its extension to problems of value. This background is required for assessing whether a Deweyan account of inquiry can sustain an epistemic defence of democracy. Without yet answering this question, I drew attention to the political stakes of his account of inquiry. The anti-foundationalism and fallibilism implicit in this account implies a certain kind of liberalism, as it demands that we take our ends – our values – to be no less subject to critical experimentation than any other beliefs. He thus laments, “we trust the [experimental] method in forming our beliefs about things not directly connected with human life. In effect, we distrust it in moral, political and economic affairs” (QC: 218).

For Dewey, the success of science demonstrates that the use of experimental methods is intelligent in a way that merely deferring to authoritative results can never be. When extended to social problems this becomes the claim that “Every measure of policy put into operation is, logically, and should be actually, of the nature of an experiment” (LTI: 502). To do otherwise, for him, is to risk acting on the basis of uncritically accepted habits – to act solely on the basis of ideology or tradition rather than employing our best standards of reasoned consideration. Further, because he thinks that our ends must be open to critical scrutiny, he diagnoses one of the primary failures of our attitude and approach to social problems to lie in a presumption that our ends are already sufficiently known and established.

While this attitude implies a form of liberalism, I briefly explored the possibility that a Deweyan account of moral inquiry could nonetheless accommodate deep disagreements – the possibility that some problems of value might be ultimately insoluble. However, it seems that if the Deweyan account of inquiry is able to accommodate the possibility of deep disagreements in moral and political contexts, the invocation of inquiry, and the fostering of experimental attitudes and habits seems potentially vacuous, as they do not tell us how to resolve such situations. To resist the charge that these methods are insignificant, Dewey

must be entitled to his contention that there is a difference in kind between values that are merely accepted and those that are arrived at or underwritten by experimental practices. If such a distinction is legitimate, then there is more than rhetoric in Dewey's worry that "if intelligent method is lacking, prejudice, the pressure of immediate circumstance, self-interest and class-interest, traditional customs, institutions of accidental historic origin, are *not* lacking, and they tend to take the place of intelligence" (QC: 211-2). The advantage of Dewey's account of inquiry for politics would be found in the demand that our values be made articulate and defensible through practices of experimental inquiry.

Chapter 3

Rorty's Anti-Epistemological Dewey

RORTY SUGGESTS THAT Dewey's epistemology gets in the way of, rather than promotes, his political vision, arguing that Dewey would have been better off admitting that he sought to make society more liberal, rather than couching this goal in the epistemological terms of a more experimental, even scientific society. In this chapter, I examine Rorty's criticism of Dewey's integration of epistemology and politics by contextualizing Rorty's anti-epistemological reading of Dewey with respect to his broader challenge to epistemological philosophy. The arguments that Rorty deploys to decouple epistemology from politics in the context of education clarifies his vision of liberal ironism and links this political philosophy to Rorty's broader critique of foundationalism. In the next chapter I expand upon this account by providing a Rortian challenge and alternative to contemporary neo-Peircean epistemic defences of democracy.

Rorty is best known for his (in)famous critique of epistemology in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. This book is his most systematic criticism of theories of knowledge. In brief, he argues against the pretensions of epistemological philosophy in contending that the assumptions that motivate a theory of knowledge are deeply problematic. To abandon these assumptions leaves epistemologists with nothing more to discuss and leaves philosophy in need of a new self-understanding. Rorty takes the work of John Dewey to be of particular importance for this critique because Dewey “point[s] the way toward, and partially exemplif[ies], a nonepistemological sort of philosophy” (1979, 381). What is interesting about the case of Dewey is that while his approach to epistemology shares few of the assumptions that Rorty criticizes as essential to epistemology, he nonetheless seems to provide a theory of knowledge in terms of inquiry. Thus, in order to maintain his critical project in the face of Dewey's anti-foundational understanding of inquiry, Rorty deploys

unique arguments which sharpen what is at stake in his anti-epistemological philosophy. In particular, I argue that Rorty’s recommendation that Dewey’s epistemological project is better rendered in purely moral or political terms reveals the stakes of Rorty’s ultimate vision of an anti-epistemological philosophy. The purpose of this chapter is not to defend a Rortian stance on any of these matters, but rather to articulate the connection between Rorty’s anti-foundationalism and his political philosophy. Aside from Kenneth Wain’s “Richard Rorty and the End of Philosophy of Education”, this connection between Rorty’s anti-epistemology and his politics has been asserted but largely taken for granted.

3.1 Rorty’s Anti-Epistemology

Rorty’s discussions of philosophical theories of truth provides a helpful starting point for understanding what he takes to be the stakes of his critique of epistemology. In the introduction to *Consequences of Pragmatism* he claims that for a pragmatist, “truth is not the sort of thing one should expect to have a philosophically interesting theory about” (1982, xiii).¹ Rorty expresses similar doubts “that there is anything general and useful to say about what makes [morally praiseworthy actions] all good” (xiii). He connects these two points explicitly when he says elsewhere:

What was epistemology? A bad answer to a bad question – a question as bad as ‘What is the good?’ Knowledge, like goodness, is a good thing. So it was thought, in both cases, that by having a theory of this good thing we might be able to acquire more of it. Neither project panned out ... neither question seems to me likely to have an interesting answer. (2000, 240)

For an account of truth to be ‘interesting’, it would not only have to help us distinguish true from false beliefs, but would increase our chances of acquiring true beliefs. Yet Rorty charges that such ‘epistemological’ ambitions for an account of truth rests on the problematic idea that truth, knowledge, rationality, or inquiry has an essence. What is additionally required for epistemology to be a viable field of inquiry is that epistemologists “be able to use their knowledge of such essence to criticize views they take to be false, and to point the direction

¹ This claim is later generalized by his claim that “as long as we see James or Dewey as having ‘theories of truth’ or ‘theories of knowledge’ or ‘theories of morality’ we shall get them wrong. We shall ignore their criticisms of the assumption that there ought to *be* theories about such matters” (160).

of progress toward the discovery of more truths” (1982, 162). This is what Rorty thinks would make epistemology an ‘interesting’ field of study. Yet he undercuts this project with a flat denial: “There is no wholesale, epistemological way to direct, or criticize, or underwrite, the course of inquiry” (162).

The central claim of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is that “to think of knowledge which presents a ‘problem,’ and about which we ought to have a ‘theory,’ is a product of viewing knowledge as an assemblage of representations. ... The moral to be drawn is that if this way of thinking of knowledge is optional, then so is epistemology, and so is philosophy as it has understood itself since the middle of the last century” (1979, 136). The ambition of this thesis is undeniable, and its challenge to philosophy is far-reaching. However, as an isolated statement it is difficult to see how such grandiose claims can be substantiated. I take his criticism of representationalism to be of primary importance to his anti-epistemological project. Although ‘representation’ is a disputed term of art for philosophers, Rorty uses the word in what is intended to be a thin enough sense to make his criticism of epistemology quite general. The prospects of a theory of knowledge are tied to the possibility of an account of how the mind represents the world. ‘Representing’ in this sense can be construed as a claim’s being faithful towards the world or reality. Similar to Aristotle’s famous definition of truth, to represent, on Rorty’s intended meaning, would be “to say of what is, that it is.” To the extent that epistemology is concerned with delimiting cases of knowledge, and insofar as knowledge is defined as a correct, accurate, or faithful representation of the world or reality, the prospect of a theory of knowledge rests upon the tight integration of truth and representation. Epistemology, on this picture, is the field of study concerned with providing an account of how the mind captures the world that allows us to determine which claims are genuine cases of knowledge, i.e. truthful, and which fall short of this target.

As the prospects of an account of truth rise or fall with the possibility of an account of representation, Rorty primarily directs his criticisms to this target. For an account of representation to be philosophically ‘interesting,’ it would have to provide criteria for which claims properly represent the world, and which fall short. Rorty relies on the work of

Wilfrid Sellars and W.V.O. Quine to argue that an interesting, i.e., informative account of representation is impossible: the combined work of these thinkers supposedly shows us “that the notion of ‘accurate representation’ is simply an automatic and empty compliment which we pay to those beliefs which are successful in helping us do what we want to do” (1979, 10).

From Sellars’ “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind”, Rorty takes the critique of the Given – the idea that the pre-conceptual character of our experience can be treated as the touchstone of knowledge. In Sellarsian terms, he argues against the idea that observations – i.e., experience – can provide a neutral check upon our theories. The issue with the notion of the Given is that to view the brute character of our experience as the hallmark of knowledge (under certain conditions) misleadingly makes it seem as if cases of knowledge must accurately capture, i.e., represent, our perceptual experience of the world. But to view experience as serving this epistemological role misleadingly construes the test of knowledge as the accurate articulation of our observations without the biases of our conceptual training; as if our conceptual and theoretical resources get in the way of, rather than promote, the acquisition of genuine knowledge. Rorty cites Quine’s “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, specifically his arguments against the tenability of the analytic/synthetic distinction, to argue that there is no deep sense in which certain ways of conceptualizing our experience can be privileged, i.e., treated as uniquely capable of describing the world, and thus guaranteeing knowledge.

“These two challenges”, Rorty contends, “were challenges to the very idea of a ‘theory of knowledge,’ and thus to philosophy itself, conceived of as a discipline which centers around such a theory” (169). On the one hand, Sellars’ critique of the Given provides reason to doubt that ‘experience’ is an interesting epistemological category – that ‘experience’, if it is to be philosophically significant, is already conceptually articulated and therefore cannot serve as an ultimate check upon justifications. On the other, Quine gives reason to doubt that there is a significant sense in which particular ways of conceptualizing experience can be said to have inherent superiority over their alternatives.

3.2 Two Senses of Foundation

It is crucial to see how this discussion is connected with what Rorty considers the professional image of philosophy. He traces the vision of philosophy he finds objectionable to the work of Immanuel Kant. “Kant,” he claims, “managed to transform the old notion of philosophy – metaphysics as ‘queen of the sciences’ – ... into the notion of a ‘most basic’ discipline – a *foundational* discipline” (1979, 132). The sense of foundations here is more general than the discussions found in contemporary literature. It demands more than what Scott Aikin, in *Epistemology and the Regress Problem*, describes as ‘regress-stoppers’ – certain epistemologically basic claims that serve to justify further claims without themselves standing in need of justification. This sense of foundations is implicated in Rorty’s critique, but it is not the primary target. His target is metaphilosophical – the thesis that philosophy (or any other field) can provide an analysis that functions as legitimizing criterion for belief. In the context of epistemology, it refers to the capacity of such accounts to distinguish cases of knowledge from mere pretence.

Philosophy, when understood as the field of inquiry concerned with establishing this kind of foundation, takes on an important role with respect to all other fields of knowledge. It no longer derives its importance from being the most general field of inquiry, but is additionally taken to have a deeper significance: on this Kantian vision “philosophy became ‘primary’ no longer in the sense of ‘highest’ but in the sense of ‘underlying’” (132). The philosopher, according to Rorty, becomes tasked with providing an account of the conditions of knowledge which can inform inquiry in other discipline.

Consider the introductory chapter of Wilfrid Sellars’ *Science, Perception and Reality* as a case in point. He defines the aim of philosophy as “to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest sense of the term” (1963, 1). Indeed, it is the “eye on the whole” – the concern with the big picture – that makes the philosopher unique. Yet it is not merely this concern that makes philosophy a distinct field of study: historians who are concerned with the interdisciplinary implications of their their work are

not thereby philosophers. While Sellars would not deny that philosophers are specialists, they are specialists of a distinctive kind. Unlike other fields of study, “philosophy in an important sense has no special subject-matter which stands to it as other subject-matters stand to other disciplines” (1963, 2). Philosophers are not concerned with philosophical problems in the same sense that historians are concerned with historical problems or physicists with problems of physics. “What is characteristic of philosophy is not a special subject-matter, but the aim of knowing one’s way around with respect to the subject-matters of all the special disciplines” (2). The Sellarsian philosopher is a generalist *par excellence*.

Although Sellars is concerned to avoid a condescending vision of philosophy in which “the scientist [has] to wait for the philosopher to clarify his subject-matter”, he considers the Platonic idea that philosophy ‘perfects’ or ‘completes’ the special sciences largely correct (4). This is because philosophy’s goal is a “synoptic vision” in which all of the special domains of knowledge can be shown to fit into one conceptual universe (4). Thus, to establish a distinctive and important role for philosophical inquiry he suggests we do not have to say that the philosopher has a unique relationship to truth or knowledge, but rather that “the specialist knows his way around in his own neighbourhood, as his neighbourhood, but doesn’t know his way around it in the same way *as part of the landscape as a whole*” (4). It is this concern with the intellectual landscape as a whole that makes philosophy something distinctive, with a subject that cannot be parcelled out to ‘persistently reflective’ specialists in other fields. The latter, while they might have an interest in the big picture of knowledge, maintain pursue this interest from a specific location within it.

We can rightly ask what justifies the crucial role of philosophy in human knowledge for Sellars. Given how he frames his claims about philosophy, its distinctive status is seemingly derived from the fact that philosophers have a ‘reflective knowledge of truths’ that, while not demanding that they know all of the results and theories of the special sciences, implies that they know how to navigate these theories – how they hang together with everything else as knowledge.

The vision thus far stated might not be immediately objectionable to Rorty: what is

additionally required are entitlements for philosophy with respect to other disciplines beyond the development of a ‘synoptic vision’. Yet there is good reason to suspect that Sellars has such ambitions for philosophy, specifically the philosophy of language, in chapters entitled “The Language of Theories”, “Grammar and Existence: A Preface to Ontology”, and “Some Reflections on Language Games.” These chapters point to a vision in which the proper domain of philosophy is to provide an account of the rules of language-games which, in turn, describe the general character of knowledge through an account of theory formation. Further, Sellars deploys these considerations to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate domains of discourse, as evinced by his privileging an ontology of “micro-theoretical” entities (fundamental physical particles) over our ordinary world of tables and chairs (1963, 126).

The reason Sellars provides for this preference is that to side with the tables and chairs over quarks or atoms reduces our theoretical language to a mere heuristic or “calculational auxiliary” (174). To admit the simultaneous existence of both quarks and chairs, he worries, poses problems for our theoretical language. He asks: “Shall we then say that *both* tables and molecules exist? If we do, we are immediately faced with the problem as to how theoretical objects and observational objects ‘fit together in one universe’ ” (118). While an account that accepts both tables and molecules is not immediately incoherent, Sellars thinks it is doomed to failure. To admit the simultaneous reality of both kinds of objects means that our theoretical language must fail to have proper explanatory authority over our observations.² If our theoretical framework is to explain the behaviour of the objects we observe, Sellars concludes, it must be privileged.

Sellars is widely recognized as an anti-foundationalist because of his famous claim that “the metaphor of ‘foundation’ is misleading in that it keeps us from seeing that if there is a logical dimension in which other empirical propositions rest on observation reports, there is another logical dimension in which the latter rest on the former” (170). Yet, it is rarely

² In considering the relationship between ‘observation’ and ‘theoretical’ languages, he similarly insists that to admit the reality of both kinds of object runs contrary to the proper function of “correspondence rules” between the two languages (125).

noted that Sellars' arguments against the Given – foundationalism as a thesis about the structure of justification – lead directly to a different kind of foundational project. To admit the Given, Sellars worries, is not merely to invite the claim that our observations provide infallible, neutral checks upon our theories but, more importantly, means that we have sided with crude experience over its interpretation in theoretical terms. To do so means that “one will be tempted to think of the authority of theoretical discourse as entirely derivative” (1963, 174). Yet for this claim to have critical force, one must already think that a general account of theory-construction is not only possible but can provide the normative force required to reveal certain putative knowledge-claims as inadequate.

Sellars' work illustrates that one can reject foundationalism in its contemporary sense, i.e. he rejects claims in favour of the existence of supposedly basic beliefs, while still being foundational in the way that Rorty takes issue with. As Sellars insists upon a choice between tables and molecules, he also thinks the Given must be given up in order for our theories to have explanatory authority. In fact, he denounces appeals to the Given as a litmus test for knowledge because to do otherwise means that our theories have been badly constructed. As it is the work of philosophy to discover the norms governing theoretical discourse, he takes philosophical inquiry to have the foundational role that Rorty denounces as “metacriticism of the special disciplines” (1979, 162).

Having identified two senses of foundation at issue in Rorty's critique – as regress-stopping basic beliefs, and as a thesis regarding the viability and perhaps the necessity of having general criteria for sorting cases of knowledge from mere pretence – an unanswered but important question is whether Rorty's issue is with the subject-matter of epistemological study, or these pretensions. Rorty's arguments suggest that he takes both as his targets because he explicitly invokes Sellars' critique of the Given against the idea that experience can provide ultimate end-points for justification. Yet debunking the pretensions that come along with the development of such epistemological foundations nonetheless seems to be Rorty's primary concern because without the claim that such foundations provide limits for inquiry or criteria for knowledge, he thinks that epistemological questions lose their motivation.

Without the assumption that answers to epistemological problems can arbitrate knowledge claims in general, or, in other words, if knowledge-claims can proceed independently of such criteria, then the project of developing a “permanent and neutral framework for inquiry” becomes uninteresting and pointless (1979, 8). To put matters in the terms of Rorty’s pragmatism, if it is up to particular fields to arbitrate their own claims to knowledge, then the appeal to general philosophical criteria would be beside the point.

To view Rorty’s critique as primarily against epistemologically basic claims, as Scott Aikin and Susan Haack, among others, do, overlooks the force of his critique.³ While Rorty cites Sellars and Quine in rejecting accounts of *the* structure of beliefs, his view is that this putative field of study is not so much incoherent as merely uninteresting. “We shall automatically be ‘in touch with the world’ (most of the time) whether or not we have any incorrigible, or basic, or otherwise privileged or foundational statements to make” (1982, 13). An argument that attempted to respond to this challenge by arguing in favour of the existence of basic beliefs would miss the point, just as an account of Rorty’s anti-foundationalism would miss the point if it treated the question of basic beliefs as of central importance in his critique.⁴ Although Rorty undoubtedly rejects the existence of basic beliefs, his challenge goes deeper. Even if we were to grant such beliefs, he would deny their significance. We simply do not have to take a stand on such issues – they should be seen as philosophically inert.

Rorty’s rejection of epistemology as foundational is thus directed less towards what are commonly referred to as epistemological foundations than it is a critique of the metaphilosophical aspirations for the field. These aspirations are behind what Rorty denounces as the aim of epistemology, if not philosophy, namely, to “tell us why our criteria of successful inquiry are not just *our* criteria but also the *right* criteria, nature’s criteria, the criteria which will lead us to *the truth*” (1979, 299).

³ Aikin’s criticism of Rorty as concerned with epistemologically basic claims is found in “Pragmatism, Experience, and the Given”. Haack’s most sustained criticism of Rorty on this point is in *Evidence and Inquiry*.

⁴ Colin Koopman’s account of Rorty’s arguments for anti-foundationalism, on this view, overly emphasizes the critique of basic beliefs in describing Rorty’s anti-foundationalism in “Rorty’s Linguistic Turn: Why (More Than) Language Matters to Philosophy” (2011).

‘Epistemological philosophy’ – the target of Rorty’s critique – is not specifically about epistemology, but rather refers to the ambitions and purpose behind this purported field of study. The two phrases Rorty most often invokes in criticizing foundational philosophy are the “tribunal of reason” (1979, 166) and “a permanent, neutral framework” that provide general grounds for the critique of “inquiry, and thus for all of culture” (8). As we saw in the case of Sellars, what positions philosophy, in particular, as the discipline most suited to provide such a framework is because it “takes as its study the ‘formal’ or ‘structural’ aspects of our beliefs” through providing an account of the proper function of theoretical languages (162). Yet what Rorty takes as his primary target in denouncing ‘foundational’ philosophy is this idea that philosophy has a “special understanding of the nature of knowledge and of mind” that enables it to arbitrate the claims made by the special disciplines – thereby keeping them honest (3).

In addition to the criticism of epistemology, in articles like “Is Natural Science a Natural Kind?” and “Science as Solidarity”, Rorty attacks attitudes towards science that attempt to privilege it as the paradigm of knowledge. These works provide an implicit account of a way in which the philosophy of science, especially the development of the field in the twentieth century, can be seen as epistemologically motivated.

Articulating a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate inquiry was largely the impetus behind the debate over demarcation. Insofar as the philosophy of science is concerned with the demarcation problem – providing criteria for sorting genuine from pseudo-sciences – such as the work of Karl Popper, the philosophy of science becomes a successor to epistemology by providing general philosophical criteria for sorting legitimate from illegitimate domains or methods of inquiry. Yet, while a distinction between scientific and nonscientific pursuits was required for the philosophy of science to have well-defined borders for its discussions, this problem often became the question of what makes legitimate – i.e. scientific – inquiries legitimate. Such an approach to the philosophy of science can be understood as ‘foundational’ because, as Rorty puts the point, “as the science of knowledge, the science of science ... it [philosophy] claimed to discover those general principles which

made scientific discourse scientific, and thus to ‘ground’ both the other sciences and itself” (1982, 141).

I will not belabour the details of why Rorty dismisses this possibility. For now it is sufficient to note that he extends his skeptical attitude towards a theory of knowledge by denying that science is a natural kind.

There are only sociological distinctions between science and non-science, distinctions revolving around such notions as expert cultures, initiation into disciplinary matrices, and the like. There are no metaphysical or methodological differences. There is nothing for philosophy of science, as opposed to the history and sociology of science, to be about. (1991, 192)

In discussing the philosophy of science as a successor to epistemology, Rorty most strikingly elaborates his proposal that we replace ‘confrontation’ with ‘conversation’ – a slogan elaborated by the claim that “we understand knowledge when we understand the social justification of belief, and thus have no need to view it as accuracy of representation” (1979, 170). The methodological point implicit in this claim is that if knowledge can be adequately described in the terms of historically contingent norms of discourse, then there is no need to supplement this account with a discussion of how theories faithfully represent the world. I will briefly sketch Rorty’s suggestion that we view science primarily as a case of socially justified belief, or what he calls conversation, because the arguments he makes in this context prefigure those he invokes to ‘salvage’ Dewey’s thought from its, to Rorty, disagreeable entanglement in epistemological pretensions.

If the philosophy of science takes its aim to be the articulation of an account of scientific method, Rorty worries that we have implicitly lapsed into a view of knowledge as the representation of the world – an ideal method being one that “gets to the essence of the object” and thereby gets us closer to the truth (1982, 152). Yet to deny that science is privileged in this way does not mean that there is nothing to say in its favour: Rorty suggests that the sciences should be lauded as paradigmatic of expert cultures that are organized around norms of evidential propriety and the attempt to build consensus by engaging in arguments – putting beliefs up for peer review.

Rorty's worry about tying the fortunes of science to a notion of 'representing the world' is that this slogan cannot be substantiated, yet it suggests that 'non-scientific' fields are ruled out as incapable of providing genuine knowledge. What philosophers mean by "the world", he charges, "is either the purely vacuous notion of the ineffable cause of sense and goal of intellect, or else a name for the objects that inquiry at the moment is leaving alone: those planks in the boat which are at the moment not being moved about" (1982, 15). Although undeniably provocative, his point is that 'facts' can only be meaningfully invoked to adjudicate a dispute when standards are already in place for determining what the relevant facts are, and assessing their significance for the matter in dispute. With this consideration in mind, Rorty suggests that 'science' should be understood primarily in terms of expert cultures, "in which argument is relatively easy – in which one can agree on some general principles which govern discourse in an area, and then aim at consensus by tracing inferential claims between these principles and more particular and more interesting propositions" (1982, 141).

What distinguishes scientific from non-scientific fields on this view is not that the former attain knowledge while the latter fall short, but rather that sciences have definite standards in place for how to adjudicate their claims to knowledge. Rorty accordingly suggests that if "we think of 'rational certainty' as a matter of victory in argument rather than of relation to an object known, we shall look toward our interlocutors rather than to our faculties for the explanation of the phenomenon" (1979, 157).

3.3 Rorty Reads Dewey

Rorty takes Dewey to be on his side in viewing scientific inquiry as a kind of conversation, rather than a confrontation with reality – i.e. an attempt to properly represent the world. In fact, Dewey makes anti-representational claims about science throughout *The Quest for Certainty*. Dewey insists that to treat the challenge of science in terms of representing the world misses the significance of its ways of engaging with problems.

When knowledge is defined from the standpoint of a reality to which the conclusions of thought must accommodate themselves, as a photograph must

be faithful to its original, there will always be disputes as to whether this or that subject can possibly be treated scientifically. But if the measure of knowledge is the quality of intelligence manifested in dealing with problems ... the issue takes on a different aspect. The question always at issue is the possibility of developing a method adequate to cope with problems. (QC: 172)

Rorty is thus on safe ground in claiming “Dewey thought that if he could break down this notion [truth as accuracy of representation], if scientific inquiry could be seen as adapting and coping rather than copying, the continuity between science, morals and art would become apparent” (1982, 86). However, he is on more contentious ground when he suggests that Dewey’s later work should be understood as therapeutic, rather than constructive (1979, 5).

As we saw in the previous chapter, Dewey shared none of the assumptions that Rorty claims sustain epistemology. He repeatedly argued against any notion of ‘immediate knowledge’, and thus denied the epistemic significance of basic beliefs. He is also anti-foundationalist in a broader sense of treating inquiry as ‘autonomous’ – as not requiring external standards to explain, support, or justify these practices. However, Dewey considered an account of the experimental practices involved in developing knowledge as not only worth pursuit, but of vital importance to philosophy as well as democratic societies. Although he preferred to call his account of knowledge a logic, reserving this term ‘epistemology’ for approaches to knowledge he found problematic, this did not imply that knowledge was something about which philosophy should have nothing to say.

So, while Rorty considers himself a Deweyan and often invokes Dewey’s name to bolster his anti-epistemological arguments, he assumes a heavy burden in claiming that epistemology was never important to Dewey. Of course he means this sincerely when, in his response to James Gouinlock, Rorty contends that Dewey “never had anything very useful to say about it [intelligence]” (1995, 93). Nonetheless this claim is undeniably provocative when one considers the numerous extended works Dewey devoted to developing his understanding of ‘intelligence’ along with purported synonyms, ‘the method of science’ and ‘reflective thought’.

Yet Rorty’s contention is not a matter of commentary, but a philosophical one. He readily

concedes that Dewey talked a lot about inquiry and attached great significance to this notion. What he denies is that Dewey should be seen as providing a substantial and wholesale – i.e., epistemological – account of these matters. Rorty claims that “for the pragmatists,” and we might add, Dewey especially, “the pattern of all inquiry – scientific as well as moral – is deliberation concerning the relative attractions of various concrete alternatives. The idea that in science or philosophy we can substitute ‘method’ for deliberation between alternative results of speculation is just wishful thinking” (1982, 164). While Dewey undeniably invoked ‘scientific method’ frequently, what Rorty denies is that it plays any significant role in Dewey’s thought. He speculates that the reason Dewey, “early and late, insisted on using the vacuous notion of ‘method’ is that he wanted philosophy to stop offering a body of knowledge, while still offering something. ‘Method’ was the name he chose for what he thought it might still provide. But it was not a fortunate choice. It promised more than he could offer – something positive, rather than the merely negative admonition not to get trapped in the past” (1995, 92).

In “Dewey Between Hegel and Darwin” Rorty makes a methodological point that is crucial for understanding his use of Dewey’s thought. His interest is less to provide an account faithful to Dewey’s self-understanding, than to “separate what is living from what is dead” in his philosophy (1998, 292). This ‘hypothetical Dewey’, as Rorty deems him, avoids the language of epistemology: he no longer employs terms such as ‘reflective thought’, ‘intelligence’, or ‘inquiry’. Like Rorty, he instead discusses social practices of ‘conversation’. This is the spirit in which we should see Rorty as engaging with Dewey’s work.

The concern is not to provide an impartial account of the man’s ideas, but to provide a philosophical reconstruction of the view that is viable as a living philosophy for our time. Instead of asking whether he is getting Dewey right, we should ask ourselves whether Rorty’s account is a philosophically interesting one – whether he is right that something like Dewey’s vision of liberal democratic politics can be articulated without any involvement in the issues of epistemology. The suggestion is radical insofar as, if successful, it would show that the epistemology detailed in the previous chapter is optional. It is in this spirit that we should

understand Rorty's provocative claim that Dewey "could have said everything he needed to say if he dropped the term 'scientific method'" (1995, 92).

Rorty advances his anti-epistemological reading of Dewey most forcefully in his introduction to the critical edition of Dewey's *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process*. Here he argues that Dewey is disingenuous when he invokes his notion of intelligence in his educational philosophy. While Rorty is right to note that Dewey saw "no need to find a natural order of precedence between ... his view about the current socio-economic order and his view of the nature of logic", his suggestion that Dewey's epistemology is ultimately vacuous implies that, integrated or not, Dewey's ideas about knowledge and inquiry weaken, rather than strengthen, his defence of his political program (1981, xi).

Rorty's primary charge against *How We Think* is that Dewey trades on ambiguities in his account of intelligent thought in order to advance what for Rorty is an irreducibly political project. When Dewey describes reflective thought in terms of methodically weighing the warrant of our beliefs, Rorty thinks that Dewey depicts his view of intelligence as "something everybody does quite naturally, something which is the common property of the ancients and the moderns, and of any reasonably literate and articulate person, no matter what his or her [political or intellectual] persuasion" (xiii). Indeed, the suggestion that we justify our beliefs as carefully as we can is something to which few people would object. However, when Dewey describes reflective thought in terms of scientific experiment, as is the case in works such as *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (the account detailed in the previous chapter), Rorty notes, "it seems as if Dewey is telling us that the seventeenth century discovered not only the true layout of the solar system and the laws of motion but a new method of inquiry, one with spectacular advantages over previous methods" (xii). The development of experimental methods in the sciences, at least as Dewey presents it, seems to have involved a momentous discovery about how beliefs can and should be warranted – an account that demands corresponding changes to how we understand responsible belief-formation and justification.

While Dewey often presents ‘reflective thought’ as something of uncontroversial value, when he specifies the demands of reflective thought, he seemingly introduces new and politically controversial requirements. Rorty accordingly complains that when Dewey describes thought as an ultimately experimental activity, it “sounds like something quite particular, something which the moderns do more of than the ancients did, something more commonly found among laboratory scientists than among medieval schoolmen, and more prevalent among liberals than among conservatives” (1981, xiii). Intelligence, when conceived as an experimental activity rather than as simply the attempt to justify our beliefs as best we can, becomes a standard that honest and reflective people can fail to achieve. By equivocating on these two characterizations of reflective thought – as mundane carefulness and as experimental method – Dewey can be seen by his opponents (or, in the case of Rorty, his supporters) as attempting to indoctrinate children to liberal values through teaching, encouraging, or even requiring them to think in certain preferred ways.

Indeed, Rorty suggests that, at least in the context of educational thought, Dewey praises an open, experimental attitude towards beliefs not because this is a requirement of intelligent behaviour but rather for the primarily political end of forming the citizen of a liberal democracy. To this extent, he agrees with Henry T. Edmondston’s assessment that “the more one reads Dewey, the more one is forced to conclude that his self-styled pragmatism is not so much a ‘practical’ choice as it is a convenient cover for his politics” (2006, 6). Or, as Rorty makes the point, the political non-neutrality of Dewey’s position “leaves Dewey wide open to the charge, often made by his enemies, that he is making socialist propaganda and disguising it as a ‘philosophical,’ and thus presumably neutral, discussion of the nature of thought” (1981, xii).

While Rorty considers problematic Dewey’s seeming attempt to philosophically ‘ground’ politics, he is unwilling to give up on the political project that Dewey’s epistemology nominally supports. He thinks Dewey should have admitted his intention to liberalize future generations without attempting to underwrite this goal with supposedly apolitical and contentious claims about the nature of intelligence. Rorty ultimately contends that *How We*

Think should be read as an irreducibly political work, written “in order to encourage teachers to encourage children ... to be critical and experimental in their reception of traditional practices and institutions” (1981, xv).

Rorty’s most common charge is that Dewey’s invocation of scientific methods of inquiry is vacuous. He argues that providing a substantial account of such a method requires Dewey “to find some sort of middle ground between a well-defined procedure – a method in the sense of a set of directions for what to do next, something like a recipe – and a mere recommendation to be open-minded, undogmatic, critical, and experimental” (xiii). However, as he doubts that such a middle ground is achievable, Rorty considers Dewey’s discussion of the method of science to amount to little more than holding a fallibilist attitude towards beliefs – being open-minded towards the possibility of their improvement. If Rorty is correct, then we are left with a view that isn’t deeply epistemological.

Were Dewey providing a substantial account of what it means to think experimentally, he should provide criteria for distinguishing the thought of people who think in this way from those who do not. But, Rorty contends, Dewey’s characterizations of intelligence and experimentation apply to Duns Scotus no less than the experimental scientists that Dewey lauds. In fact, although Dewey often praises the thinkers of the scientific revolution for thinking in light of the best methods available to them, Rorty contends that “it is not clear that [their religious opponents] thought differently” (xvi). While Rorty concedes that we can say that religious conservatives have different purposes, and therefore different criteria of relevance, this doesn’t provide grounds for a methodological censure of religious opponents of science. After all, Rorty is right to point out that it is difficult to deny that Scotus’ thoughts on theological matters were, by any standard, reflective. We might be tempted to say that Scotus failed to be adequately reflective because he was insufficiently sceptical about certain of his beliefs. However, Rorty leadingly asks, “is there any ‘method’ by which [he] could have known which beliefs he should have questioned?” (xvi).

Rorty more fully details his skepticism towards method in responding to James Gouinlock’s “What is the Legacy of Instrumentalism?” Against Gouinlock, he says, “I think that

‘scientific method’ is a name for an unfindable middle ground between a set of virtuous habits ... and a set of concrete, teachable techniques” (1995, 92–93). Rorty understands ‘techniques’ as the skilled use of tools to resolve problems – intellectual or otherwise. Specifically, he mentions the use of magnetometers to measure magnetic fields as exemplifying a technique. In using such a tool for its appointed purpose, there are criteria in place to determine whether one has employed the technique correctly or incorrectly. However, when ‘scientific method’ is invoked to refer to something more completely general, Rorty finds the term irredeemably and problematically vague. Unlike scientific techniques, he does not see ‘methods’ as placing specific demands upon a practice. Similarly, he is unable to see any substance behind the claim that ‘experimental’ is an adjective that meaningfully applies to certain methods, but not others. To be ‘experimental’ places no concrete requirements upon a practice and there are no clear criteria for when one has been suitably experimental towards one’s beliefs.

Contrasting his view with Charles Peirce, Rorty claims “unless we can contrast ‘scientific method’ with something beside what Peirce called the methods of tenacity and authority, then ‘scientific method’ will remain too noncontroversial to make a fuss about” (92–93).⁵ If all that is required to be scientific or experimental is to avoid deferring to authority and being willing to embrace circumstances that could make settled beliefs open to doubt, then many people meet this standard. Yet, if most suitably honest and critical people already behave this way, Rorty doesn’t see much differentiating the requirement to be ‘scientific’ and ‘experimental’ towards one’s beliefs from the mere suggestion to be open-minded. He thus concludes that for Dewey “the term ‘scientific method’ signifie[s] little more than Peirce’s injunction to remain experimental and open-minded in one’s outlook – to make sure that one was not blocking the road of inquiry” (1998, 192).

Rorty takes particular issue with Dewey’s presentation of Christopher Columbus to

⁵ Dewey employs a similar contrast in the introduction to *How We Think*. Here, he contrasts “reflective thought” with “tradition, instruction, [and] imitation” (LW8: 116). Thoughts formed on the basis of the latter are “prejudices; that is, prejudgments, not conclusions reached as the result of personal mental activity, such as observing, collecting, and examining evidence. Even when they happen to be correct, their correctness is a matter of accident as far as the person who entertains them is concerned” (116).

illustrate the demands of ‘reflective thought’ – the way of thinking to be instilled in students. While he is willing to concede that the belief in a flat earth was based on some degree of evidence (namely, that the world ordinarily appears as such), Dewey notes that the problem was “this evidence was not further looked into; it was not checked by considering other evidence; there was no search for new evidence” (LW8: 117). Dewey praises Christopher Columbus for testing his belief that the world is spherical by acting upon it. This belief has implications which could be determined in the attempt to circumnavigate the globe. “Ultimately”, Dewey claims, “the belief [in the flatness of the earth] rested on laziness, inertia, custom, absence of courage and energy in investigation”, whereas Columbus’ belief in the spherical globe “rest[ed] upon careful and extensive study, upon purposeful widening of the area of observation, upon reasoning out the conclusions of alternative conceptions to see what would follow in case one or the other were adopted for belief” (117).⁶

Rorty, however, finds this contrast unfair to Columbus’ contemporaries. To laud Columbus while dismissing his detractors as lazy or timid is unfair to the latter: there is no ‘methodical’ reason that demanded that this particular belief be critiqued. Of course, it turned out that Columbus was right, and contrary belief did yield to critical scrutiny. But to claim, as Dewey seems to do, that Columbus was right because he was more ‘intelligent’ or employed the ‘scientific method’ overstates what differentiated him from his contemporaries. The appeal to ‘method’ cannot tell us which beliefs are in need of scrutiny, and thus Rorty concludes that the most we can say in Columbus’ favour was that he was more open-minded (at least about a few things) than others.

3.4 Education and Conversation

If Rorty is right that Dewey’s discussion of the ‘method of science’ amounts to little more than having a fallibilist attitude towards beliefs – an acknowledgment that they can usually be improved upon – we seem to be left with a view that isn’t deeply epistemological. Indeed,

⁶ Jeffrey Burton Russell’s *Inventing the Flat Earth* (1991) convincingly shows that the treatment of Columbus as a rationalist hero is mythical and erroneous. Virtually no educated people of the time believed in the existence of a flat earth: those who objected to Columbus’ voyage rather questioned his estimates of the distance to Asia on the basis of Ptolmy’s calculations of the Earth’s circumference (8).

when we keep in mind that Rorty suggests that we should understand justification as social, i.e. as arising in the context of conversation with our peers, being open-minded seems to demand little more than being willing to listen to others and, similarly, to subject our own beliefs to peer review. To reiterate his slogan: it is to replace confrontation with conversation.

This view comes out most clearly in Rorty's critique of John McDowell, both in "Is Truth A Goal of Inquiry?" and "The Very Idea of Human Answerability to The World". While Rorty agrees that "in art, morals, and politics we want to judge correctly", he disagrees with McDowell that norms of correct judgment require additional, supplementary accounts of the 'world-directedness' of our beliefs, 'truth', or 'things *indeed* being thus and so'. Each of these, Rorty charges, "sounds hollow" (1998, 139).

Of course he intends the stronger claim that such notions are unnecessary and references the work of Robert Brandom to show why. Rorty sides with Brandom against McDowell because "Brandom is content to think of normativity, of the possibility of correctness and incorrectness [of judgment, assertion, and belief], in terms of human beings' answerability to one other" (139). On Rorty's account, Brandom's articulation of the social practices of 'giving and asking for reasons' allows him to "say everything he needs to say about objectivity, about the possibility that any given judgment we make, no matter how unanimously, could be wrong, without ever talking about 'answerability to the world' or 'world-directedness'" (139). Sufficient objectivity for our claims can be established by simply ensuring that we keep ourselves accountable to our peers. But if so, "there seems no occasion to look for obedience to an *additional* norm – the commandment to seek the truth" (26).

While Rorty's endorsement of Brandom is in need of qualification, it is sufficient for my present purposes to highlight the elements of Brandom's thought that Rorty finds most congenial.⁷ The social practices of giving and asking for reasons, as described by Brandom, provides a sense of 'rationality' that Rorty finds uncontroversial. This sense of

⁷ Joseph Margolis, among others, finds Rorty's endorsement of Brandom suspicious as it seems to open the door to *some* sympathy with topics discussed under the heading of epistemology. He claims "Rorty's close connection with the work of his former student, Robert Brandom, suggests very soberly to me that Rorty may regard Brandom's recent efforts to recover philosophical semantics and epistemology as at least a trial balloon for his own eventual return to more standard fare" (2002b, 103).

rationality requires little more than a willingness to engage in conversation, understood as exchanging reasons with those around us. It is, as Rorty describes in “Rationality and Cultural Difference”, “roughly synonymous with tolerance” and involves both “a willingness to alter one’s own habits” as well as “a reliance on persuasion rather than force, and inclination to talk things over rather than to fight, burn, or banish” (1998, 187). That this account emphasizes reasons instead of metaphors might raise a potential problem for Rorty’s wholehearted endorsement of Brandom’s account. However, this lies beyond the scope of the present presentation.

More important is what Rorty identifies and endorses as Brandom’s pragmatism. “To say that philosophy’s task is to make human practices explicit rather than to legitimize them by reference to something beyond them is to say that there is no authority beyond utility for these purposes to which we can appeal” (128). This is to say that when it comes to describing rationality, there is no need for notions such as truth, experience, or reality in order for our claims to be adequately justified. Rorty contends that no such ultimate authorities are available or philosophically viable. Instead, we have no responsibilities beyond those to other people: truthfulness, honesty, open-mindedness – the willingness to exchange our reasons with our peers and to revise our beliefs in light of such conversations. Such qualities, however, are ultimately moral rather than epistemological. I take this to be the final move in Rorty’s arguments against epistemology. I will briefly examine his account of education to elaborate this claim and then return to his reading of Dewey’s philosophy.

Rorty’s positive claims about politics and education follow from his suggestion that philosophers replace ‘confrontation’ with ‘conversation’ and ‘objectivity’ with ‘solidarity’. The view he puts forward in “Education as Socialization and Individuation” articulates what he takes the end of epistemology to imply for both education and politics. The political right, he claims, identifies the goal of education to be the inculcation of true beliefs in the young. By contrast, he thinks that leftists, such as himself, tend to emphasize increased freedom as the goal of education. However, he tempers this contrast by claiming that both left and right often take truth and freedom to be so deeply intertwined that securing one will lead to

the other. Thus, he identifies the substantial difference between these positions as practical and political, rather than philosophical. The difference turns on the question whether “the present socioeconomic set-up ... is, on the whole, a realization of human potentialities, or rather a way of frustrating [these]” (1999, 115).

Although Rorty endorses a form of what he considers the leftist attitude towards education, he concedes that an adequate compromise has been struck between these two approaches so far as educational institutions are concerned. “Education”, he claims, “covers two entirely distinct, and equally necessary, processes – socialization and individuation” (117). While socialization is largely the goal of primary and secondary schools, individuation, if achieved through formal education at all, occurs primarily at the college level. Thus, a necessary division of labour has emerged in the institutions of education because “socialization,” he concedes, “has to come before individuation, and education for freedom cannot begin before some constraints have been imposed” (118).

While these requisite constraints on individuation are often treated as being (at least in part) epistemological, referring to the acquisition of basic factual knowledge, Rorty subsumes these considerations under the heading of ‘socialization.’ Taking Dewey to be on his side on this matter, he claims, “Dewey’s great contribution to the theory of education was to help us get rid of the idea that education is a matter of either inducing or educating truth. Primary and secondary education will always be a matter of familiarizing the young with what their elders take to be true, whether it is true or not” (118). Setting aside the question of whether this is a faithful rendering of Dewey’s position, we can say that, for Rorty at least, the desired socialization can be attained without appeal to standards of belief that transcend our community. We can readily describe our educative practices and justify their goals without invoking epistemology. The aim of socialization sufficiently captures these purposes.

With these considerations in mind, I return to Rorty’s proposed reading of Dewey’s philosophy of education. Alven Neiman’s article, “Rorty’s Dewey”, elaborates the implications of Rorty’s antifoundationalism for his reading of this part of Dewey’s work. Neiman agrees

with Rorty that eschewing both the metaphysical and epistemological elements of Dewey's thought provides the best way to defend the particular institution of universities in democratic society: "we are better off choosing Deweyan irony over Deweyan 'first philosophy' in our quest to improve the university" (1996, 126). I will describe 'ironism' at more length in the next chapter. For now, a tentative understanding of the terms can be found in Rorty's thesis that we do not need to invoke standards that transcend our community in order to justify an educational practice.

Neiman interprets and endorses a Deweyan 'ironist' educational project, on Rorty's behalf. He claims, "as an aspect of politics, liberal education must ... aim at self-correcting modes of teaching and learning rather than instruction understood as a Cartesian ascent by way of first principles" (125). In line with Dewey's account of education, it seems that Rorty might agree that accepted values be taught as demanding inquiry, rather than being wholly settled and therefore immune from scrutiny (as described in §2.3). However, as we have seen, Rorty finds the term 'inquiry' misleading. It suggests a vacuous hope for a method, whereas conversational norms will suffice.

Neiman's account provides a plausible gloss on what Rorty means when he endorses a broadly 'Deweyan' vision of education, albeit a de-epistemologized version of it. It elaborates Rorty's contention that moral language is sufficient for us to capture what we want when discussing the purportedly 'epistemological' virtue of open-mindedness. For example, Rorty complains that "the trouble with Dewey's characterization of 'reflective thinking' is that the only people who do *not* practise it are those whom we think of as either mentally deficient or morally flawed" (1981, xiv). Rorty here takes Dewey to be on his side in eschewing epistemology for politics, at least implicitly. On Rorty's view, for Dewey, "the target of instruction and reform must be those who are dogmatic, opinionated, unwilling to listen, difficult to converse with", the contrast at issue is between people who are open-minded and those who are stubborn – a difference of moral character (xv). Yet if Dewey's target is stubbornness and dogmatism, rather than people who are insufficiently 'intelligent' or 'scientific', Rorty contends that the appeal to experimentation is beside the point, if not mis-

leading. The suggestion to be experimental “would appeal only if the method commended were a method for doing something which those addressed already want to do. Yet people of this kind do not want to be critical and experimental. They cherish their certainties” (1981, xv). Instead, we should avoid epistemological language and simply accept that appeals to be more ‘intelligent’ about beliefs are, at base, political: they concern the kind of communities we want to live in and strive to achieve.

To recognize stubborn closed-mindedness as a moral, rather than an epistemological flaw suggests that justifying certain educational goals in democratic society on epistemological grounds is wrongheaded. This is Rorty’s most decisive challenge to Dewey’s account of education. “It is not clear that we can ground a judgment about the ends of education – about the character-types we wish the schools to develop – upon an inquiry into the nature of thought” (xv). As we will see in the next chapter, such claims also provide reason to hesitate in the claim that pragmatism can or should provide think of itself as providing grounds for politics and morality. We can rightly say that we would prefer that education prepare students and future citizens to be open-minded, as this enables social and political discourse in a democracy to function more smoothly. However, this is a decidedly political rather than an epistemological matter, and should be treated as such.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented Rorty’s anti-epistemology as primarily a metaphilosophical thesis. Rather than narrowly arguing against epistemological foundations, i.e., whether epistemically basic claims are required for justification, Rorty’s target is claim that a philosophical theory of knowledge might underpin the legitimacy of knowledge in other fields. I showed how this thesis factors in Rorty’s reading of Dewey, along with its implications for his philosophy of education.

Although Rorty agrees that in Dewey’s mind epistemology and politics were integrated, he charges that Dewey’s theory of inquiry masks an irreducibly political project. The Deweyan claim that one is developing ‘critical intelligence’ in students is tantamount to

liberalizing them, as it requires established traditions be made subject to scrutiny. The decisive move in Rorty's reinterpretation of Dewey's project is found in his charge that the open-mindedness that Deweyan education takes as its goal can and should be understood in moral rather than epistemological terms. The anti-dogmatism demanded by Dewey's position is, as Rorty claims, "better suited to liberal and secular projects than it is for religious and conservative ones" (1981, xiii). While Rorty accepts this preference as one worth having, it is ultimately a political matter regarding the kind of character we wish of our citizenry, rather than a thesis that can be grounded in an epistemological theory about the nature of intelligence.

Rorty's alternate reading of Dewey suggests that he considers moral language – which I connect to his notion of conversational virtues – sufficient to capture the force of the purportedly 'epistemological' virtue of critical open-mindedness. This supposed equivalence is Rorty's decisive challenge to Dewey, as well as the stakes of his own non-epistemological philosophy. In the next chapter I show how this line of argument provides a far-reaching challenge to epistemic defences of democracy.

Chapter 4

Deweyan Inquiry and Epistemic Democracy

IN THE PREVIOUS chapter, I articulated Richard Rorty's vision of non-epistemological philosophy and detailed some of its implications for his reading of John Dewey's work. I contrasted their accounts of education in a democratic society as this reveals the stakes of Rorty's attempt to construct an 'ironist Dewey'. This reading rests on Rorty's contention that political and moral norms sufficiently capture what are ordinarily considered to be purely epistemic considerations regarding proprieties of belief such as fallibility and open-mindedness. If such a reading is viable, it implies a kind of priority for politics over epistemology. The challenge that Rorty directs towards a Deweyan philosophical project requires me to make explicit the connection between political and epistemic considerations in Dewey's thought. Doing so is the goal of this chapter, and defending this against Rorty's challenge is a goal of the next.

I articulate a position that lies between the epistemic defences of democracy by neo-Peirceans (Cheryl Misak and Robert Talisse) and Rorty's non-epistemological liberal ironism. From Rorty's perspective, the attempt by Misak and Talisse to derive political consequences from epistemic norms reverses the order of explanation. Worse, such justifications for someone's preferred politics only serve to weaken the commitment to democracy by tying it to a philosophically suspect account of rationality. I endorse the first of these criticisms, albeit in a qualified way. In doing so I oppose Deweyans such as Robert Westbrook, and Phillip Deen, who are interested in showing how a Deweyan account complements such justificatory projects. I argue that there are good pragmatist, and particularly Deweyan, reasons to reject these 'defenses' of democracy. However, unlike Rorty, I maintain that there nonetheless remains an important place for epistemic considerations in the articulation of a commitment to democracy.

Providing a positive account of how epistemic and political concerns should be integrated, however, is easier said than done. Developing the framework for such an account is the goal of this chapter. I take aim at Rorty's claim that "the institutions and culture of liberal society would be better served by a vocabulary of moral and political reflection" which avoids these epistemic distinctions, while nonetheless agreeing with him that certain ways of integrating epistemic and political concerns are deeply problematic (1989, 44). Democratic life demands that citizens' beliefs be open to scrutiny, but this does not imply that such considerations about responsible belief legitimate a commitment to democratic politics. Such epistemic concerns might play an important role in our articulation of such commitment and, as Elisabeth Anderson has argued, allow us to enhance and refine this commitment. However, contrary to Misak and Talisse, it cannot provide non-circular grounds for valuing democratic methods of conducting politics.

After detailing a Rortian critique of epistemic defences of democracy, I argue that the Deweyan account of inquiry detailed in chapter 2 makes it especially well-suited for articulating the synergistic relationship between epistemic and political concerns in a democratic society. Such an account allows us to describe how these complement one-another without reducing either consideration to the other.

4.1 Justifying Democracy

In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Richard Rorty's stated target is the view that there is a bridge between 'private' and 'public' philosophy – i.e., that an account of individual moral perfection can provide a basis for political theory. While it is a laudable task to provide a vision of the moral or creative perfection of individuals, it is too much to expect such an account to provide grounds for an adequate political philosophy. The purposes served by an account of individual perfection cannot address questions regarding how to best arrange political institutions. A comprehensive account – one that can meet both needs and allows us to adjudicate conflicts between the two is unlikely to succeed. "The vocabulary of self-creation is necessarily private, unshared, unsuited to argument. The vocabulary of

justice is necessarily public and shared, a medium for argumentative exchange” (1989, xiv).

Given their different goals, it is inevitable for these discourses to talk past one another. But this is only a problem if we think that these two different projects can be bridged. Rorty contends, “there is no way to bring self-creation together with justice at the level of theory” (xiv). Although this denial has consequences for traditional attempts to subsume public to private concerns in cases of conflict between them, Rorty takes this implication to be unproblematic. “We shall only think of these two kinds of writers as *opposed* if we think that a more comprehensive philosophical outlook would let us hold self-creation and justice, private perfection and human solidarity, in a single vision” (xiv). More succinctly, he claims these two kinds of accounts are “as little in need of synthesis as are paintbrushes and crowbars” (xiv).

This line of argument is less my concern than a related topic that is implicitly developed throughout Rorty’s discussion: his defence of the autonomy of ‘public’ philosophy – the thesis that ‘public’, i.e. political, philosophy can be free-standing. Indeed, while Rorty himself frequently elaborates his claims about ‘liberal ironism’ in differentiating ‘public’ from ‘private philosophy’, his elaboration of this thesis implies an anti-foundationalism that outstrips this distinction. Although Rorty describes liberal ironism as the claim that we can endorse liberal political principles without grounding such commitments on substantive claims about the nature of human beings or rationality, on my interpretation this claim should be understood as part of a broader thesis that justifying political commitments (particularly liberal or democratic ones) does not require *any* apolitical basis. One can endorse such principles or values without grounding them on some more basic consideration. In his words, “for liberal ironists, there is no answer to the question ‘Why not be cruel?’ – no noncircular theoretical backup for the belief that cruelty is horrible” (xv). Of primary interest is his contention that we can endorse liberal democratic principles without invoking substantive epistemological claims about the nature of belief or rationality.

Rorty elaborates the positive implications of this thesis for political philosophy in terms of hope and utopianism: “Liberal ironists are people who include among these ungroundable

desires their own hope that suffering will be diminished, that the humiliation of human beings by other human beings may cease” (1989, xv). I have little to say about Rortian hope. Indeed, I have little to say about Rorty’s positive political views. Of primary importance for my discussion is to see the metaphilosophical implications of endorsing liberal principles while acknowledging their theoretical contingency. On this view, any justification we give for our endorsement of liberal democratic principles will reek of rationalization and special pleading.

Advocating irony about a philosophical ‘justification’ of liberalism places a unique burden on Rorty. It is not simply enough for him to say that liberalism has no foundations: he needs to argue that purported foundations, often assumed to be required to underwrite liberal principles, actually undermine their achievement. Thus, in articulating his ‘liberal ironism’, Rorty claims to be strengthening liberalism by separating it from its historical baggage: “the vocabulary of Enlightenment rationalism, although it was essential to the beginnings of liberal democracy, has become an impediment to the preservation and progress of democratic societies” (44).

Of course, the claim that liberalism has no theoretical foundations would be historically false: the development of liberal political philosophies involved substantial claims about human nature and/or rationality that provided philosophical grounds for such politics. One does not need to look very hard to find such remarks throughout the work of Locke, Mills, or Kant. However, Rorty contends that this does not imply that taking a stand on such matters is necessary, nor does it imply that liberalism’s fate is inextricably tied to such notions.

Rorty critiques Adorno and Horkheimer’s dismissal of liberal democracy for making this very mistake. In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno and Horkheimer criticize Enlightenment notions of rationality and, particularly, the notion of individuality that they take to follow from this understanding, to conclude that, as Rorty puts the point, “liberalism [is] now intellectually bankrupt, bereft of philosophical foundations, and that liberal society [is] morally bankrupt, bereft of social glue.” (56). According to Rorty, their argument is deeply flawed because it rests on the mistaken assumption that liberal democratic institutions are

only as good as their theoretical articulation. They assumed “that the terms in which those who begin a historical development described in their enterprise remain the terms which describe it correctly, and then inferred that the dissolution of that terminology deprives the results of that development of the right to ... continued existence. This is almost never the case” (Rorty 1989, 56).

While the theoretical works of figures such as Locke, Mill, and Kant, have played an important role in the articulation of contemporary liberal institutions and ideals, it would be a mistake to conclude that critiquing such formulations has serious repercussions for the continued existence or even viability of present political institutions. Even if the liberalism that results from Mill’s philosophy does, as Adorno and Horkheimer might suggest, lead to the alienation and disenfranchisement of individuals, this cannot be the whole argument against liberal political institutions. This political machinery is sufficiently established that it has a life of its own that goes beyond its original theoretical articulation. A further argument would be needed to show why these institutions are incapable of improvement.

This is not to say that philosophical critiques are doomed or irrelevant. Nor does it imply that philosophical critiques will inevitably fail to yield social and political consequences. However, it must be kept in mind that it is always an open question whether any particular philosophical notions are playing an indispensable role for the continued acceptability of our practices when critiquing them. Challenges to liberal democracy, such as those of Adorno and Horkheimer must also show that associated institutions lose their legitimacy in the absence of such theoretical grounds. In the face of such philosophical critiques – “when the value of such institutions is challenged – not by practical proposals for the erection of alternative institutions but in the name of something more ‘basic’ – no direct answer can be given, because there is no neutral ground” (197).

Michael Walzer’s *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* provides a non-foundational account of political and philosophical critique that Rorty considers congenial. Walzer contends that any argument for democracy is inevitably local. Arguments that point out failures of democracy demand “the realization of democratic idealism here and

now” rather than advocate for the abandonment of democratic ideals (1994, 58). Such criticisms are offered to illustrate how our politics have failed to be sufficiently transparent or accountable. They are not intended as challenges to ideals of transparency or accountability in politics.

Such challenges should not be misconstrued as attempts to answer the global question why anyone should prefer democracy over other political arrangements. Walzer considers this question to be largely settled. “Democracy”, he claims, “has priority or at least special standing among contemporary American ideals. The adjectives are important – ‘contemporary,’ ‘American’ – for it is clear, again, that this critique does not involve or require a defence of democracy in every time and place” (59). Like Rorty’s attitude towards notions such as knowledge and truth, Walzer considers “the old Greek question about the best regime” to have “no singular and universal answer” (59). The most potent critiques we can deploy are local and specific. But this is not to say there isn’t an important role for philosophical arguments for democracy. Walzer contends that his denial of the ‘old Greek question’ does not imply “that democracy can’t be defended; we have reasons for preferring it. But I take that question to be settled – for us at least” (58).

The role of the philosophy of democracy is not to justify democracy once and for all, against all challenges. The interesting philosophical questions rather consists of “a series of interpretive claims about the meaning [of this settlement]”. He elaborates: “Yes, we are all democrats. What follows from that commitment? What sort of life do democrats live when they are living in an authentically democratic way?” (58–9). Although ‘we’ are certainly democrats, it is valuable to nonetheless elaborate what we take this commitment to involve and determine how far we take it to extend.¹ But what we cannot expect of philosophy is a

¹ William Nelson has recently expressed a similar sentiment in “The Epistemic Value of the Democratic Process”:

To speak of justifying or defending democracy is to suggest that it is under attack, and perhaps even that one is responding to some specific charge or criticism. In fact, democracy (as opposed to particular theories of democracy) is not seriously under attack. But even if almost everyone agrees that some form of democratic or representative government is better than the alternatives, there is disagreement about why it is desirable. Most philosophical work on democracy aims to articulate some idea of what it is about democracy that makes it desirable, and, by implication, what is objectionable about some extant democratic institutions and how

defense of democracy that simultaneously addresses all audiences in all social circumstances. The very idea that such an account is required, while familiar to the philosophical tradition, presumes that such a context-free, universal justification is required for democracy to be established as legitimate.

The affinities between this vision and Rorty's pragmatism should be clear. Although Rorty says the following when praising Robert Brandom's 'social practice' accounts of language and semantics, it is no less applicable to his attitude towards political philosophy: "to say that philosophy's task is to make human practices explicit rather than to legitimize them by reference to something beyond them is to say that there is no authority beyond utility for these purposes to which we can appeal" (1998, 128). This is to say, as Walzer similarly proposes, that the aim of a democratic political philosophy is to provide a contextual elaboration of this ideal as well as its implications, no more, no less.

This account of the connection between democracy and philosophy renders obsolete the requirement of a foundation external to the practice of politics itself. Rorty claims that ironist political philosophy should "regard the justification of liberal society simply as a matter of historical comparison with other attempts at social organization – those of the past and those envisaged by utopians" (1989, 53). What we do not need, he insists, is "to have human projects underwritten by a nonhuman authority" (52).

Rorty's worry is that invoking nonhuman authorities to underwrite our politics, whether Truth, God, or Rationality, invites the risk of overriding decisions arrived at by democratic means (52). Thus he considers attempts to ground liberal democratic commitments on any such notions as incoherent. Although Rorty would have fundamental disagreements with Gerald Gaus, he would be sympathetic to his description of democratic society as one in which citizens are in relationships of mutual authority with their peers. When described in this way it makes it sound as though no norm beyond such mutual responsibility is required. Rorty comes close to defining liberalism in such terms when he describes a such a society as:

they might be improved (2008, 19).

one whose ideals can be fulfilled by persuasion rather than force, by reform rather than revolution, by the free and open encounters of present linguistic and other practices with suggestions for new practices. But this is to say that an ideal liberal society is one which has no purpose except freedom, no goal except a willingness to see how such encounters go and to abide by the outcome. (1989, 60)

Similarly, a liberal society is one that abides by decisions arrived at through democratic means. It “is content to call ‘true’ (or ‘right’ or ‘just’) whatever the outcome of undistorted communication happens to be, whatever view wins in a free and open encounter” (1989, 67).

Although liberalism is unsuited to philosophical foundations, this does not imply that there is nothing for philosophers to say in its favour. However, the scope of such claims must be carefully qualified. Rather than providing a ‘foundation’, Rorty sees himself as ‘redescribiing’ these ideals. In other words, in attempting to articulate liberal ideals without notions such as ‘rationality’ or ‘human nature’, Rorty is not seeking to replace these notions with alternatives, but attempts to describe liberalism in a way that no longer depends upon such concepts. But, he rightly notes that this vision requires us to rein in our philosophical ambitions: “to offer a redescription of our current institutions and practices is not to offer a defense of them against their enemies; it is more like refurnishing a house than like propping it up or placing barricades around it” (44–45). The best that philosophy can provide is a circular justification of our commitment to liberal democratic principles – “a justification which makes one feature of our culture look good by citing still another, or comparing our culture invidiously with others by reference to our own standards” (57). Taking John Dewey and John Rawls to be in agreement with him on this matter, Rorty considers such a justification “the only sort of justification we are going to get” (57).

4.2 Foundationalism in Misak’s Epistemic Defense

Both Cheryl Misak and Robert Talisse consider the thesis that we cannot provide an ultimate philosophical backup to democracy troubling. Both, accordingly, frame their political philosophies in opposition to what they perceive to be the justificatory shortcomings of Rorty’s ironism. “Rorty’s brand of pragmatism,” Misak charges, “betrays what is good and

deeply interesting in the pragmatist tradition” (2008, 95). In particular, she considers Rorty’s liberal ironism inadequate because he “does not provide us with an independent or neutral justification of the liberal or democratic virtues; he just assumes those virtues” (2000, 25). Robert Talisse more strongly echoes this claim when he accuses Rorty of “not proposing a political philosophy but proffering liberal propaganda” (2005, 5–6). For both, to abstain from grounding a commitment to liberal democracy on something more fundamental is tantamount to simply insisting upon its validity. Without offering more in the name of democracy, Talisse claims that on Rorty’s view we must “hope to achieve that which we no longer think is worth achieving, we must draw inspiration from that which we contend is essentially not inspiring” (75–6).

The problem that Misak sees with Rorty’s ‘redescription’ of liberalism is that it leaves us with little normative ground to use against non-liberal challenges to democratic values. Her charge is completely correct, and Rorty cheerfully admits as much, which may make her even more infuriated. To see why this is the case, it is worth exploring Misak’s treatment of Carl Schmitt. As Misak describes, Schmitt advances a powerful challenge to liberal politics. Politics, on his view, needs to be understood as a power struggle between groups. “The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy” (1932, 26). Liberal democratic societies, however, with their commitment to tolerance and equality, fail to sharply draw this crucial distinction, instead trying to make ‘enemies’ into ‘economic competitors’ or interlocutors. Therein lies its weakness: liberal democracies will eventually succumb to the force of a homogeneous group which is committed to a strong, unified vision of the good.

Prophesying aside, Misak’s concern with Schmitt’s account of politics is that it makes it seem as though liberal politics is a political orientation on par with any other and leaves us with no principled way of assessing the moral status of different groups or ways of social organization. Schmitt puts the point as follows: “If a people no longer possesses the energy or the will to maintain itself in the sphere of politics, the latter [i.e., politics] will not thereby vanish from the world. Only a weak people will disappear” (53). Liberalism betrays

its weakness in refusing to distinguish ‘friend’ from ‘enemy’ – by, in short, attempting to “eliminate” politics (1932, 78). In the end, liberalism is simply another, albeit deficient, form of political power. The difference being that liberals fail to recognize this.

Misak thinks this challenge cannot go without a response. As she puts it, “the Schmittian does not want to live peacefully with those who do not share his conception of the good. He will turn rather to the project of securing substantive homogeneity in a nation, by violent means if necessary” (2000, 30). So how should liberals respond? While it is unlikely that we could convince Schmittians out of their belief that liberal politics is, like any other, based on power, she thinks we must be able to at least defend democratic values against such challenges. What can be said to those who reject liberal democratic principles, she asks. “Why *must* we value cooperation and equality? Why *must* we want to live in a harmonious stable pluralistic society, as opposed to the Schmittian homogeneous society?” (26, emphasis mine)

Rortian ironism, she charges, provides us with nothing to say when confronted by such challenges. It “leaves us with no way of adjudicating claims that arise in different communities” (2008, 100). On this matter, Misak takes Rorty to be little different than Schmitt. After all, on Rorty’s view the best we can provide are local and contingent reasons for our beliefs, preferences, and practices. In this case, we believe in equality in part because we were fortunate enough to have been born into “societies whose institutions encompass most of the hard-won achievements of the West in the two centuries since the Enlightenment” (Rorty 2007, 48). But, Misak worries, to admit this is to concede that our reasons for holding democratic values are “are merely historically conditioned reasons, *no different in status or worth* from the neo-Nazi’s reasons based on inequality and hatred of those who are foreign” (2000, 16, emphasis mine).² Talisse makes the same point. “Rorty’s political antifoundationalism places liberal democracy on a philosophical par with tyranny” (2005, 75).

² Even less charitably, Misak thinks that Rorty’s admission of the contingency of such beliefs “is incompatible with his commitment to his own set of beliefs and with his practice of arguing or giving reasons for them” (2008, 100).

Such views are commonly attributed to Rorty, but are unfair to his fully articulated position. While Rorty indeed thinks that there are unlikely to be truly independent, impartial reasons to which we can appeal in convincing despots, for instance, to become democrats – we cannot ‘refute’ them – this does not, he thinks, force us into quietism about our political values nor does it render inert our reasons for advocating democracy. We can continue to endorse liberal democratic principles and hope that others come to adopt them. We can also adopt means to try and convince others to share these beliefs with us.

However, we must be careful to avoid overstating the philosophical status of such attempts. “In my view,” Rorty claims, “there is no *neutral*, noncircular way to defend the liberal’s claim that cruelty is the worst thing we do, any more than there is a neutral way to back up Nietzsche’s assertion that this claim expresses a resentful, slavish attitude” (1989, 197). Any request we make, any reasons we provide for our moral or political values is going to reflect the very values in dispute. They will beg the question. But, contrary to Misak’s suggestion, this does not mean that we should abstain from giving reasons to attempt to get non-liberals to coexist peacefully with others. What Rorty denies is that the reasons we provide should be assumed to be binding to such interlocutors – that they are obliged to change or modify their projects in light of these. “[Logical] arguments ... are all very well in their way, and useful as expository devices, but in the end not much more than ways of getting people to change their practices without admitting they have done so” (78). Our request that non-liberals ‘privatize’ their projects is just that: a request. But Rorty suggests we will only be disappointed with such a result if we think that *our* standards are the standards to which they must submit themselves. This, he thinks, would overstate their status, however much we might hope for this to be the case.

Both Misak and Talisse think that this qualification implies that Rorty must ultimately see all political views as just as good as any other. Talisse, for example, claims that “Rorty does not allow one to maintain that democracy is in any relevant way better than, say, tyranny” (2005, 75). That this is uncharitable should be clear. As we saw, Rorty thinks there is a lot we can say in favour of our democratic political values. What he denies is that we can provide

non-circular grounds. Liberal democracies, among other things, allow for greater social freedom than other political orders. But pointing this out is unlikely to convince those who don't see social freedom as valuable.

Misak and Talisse consider this feature of Rorty's ironism and, as we will see more fully in the next chapter, Rawls' political liberalism to be inadequate because neither can properly engage non-liberal views. Rorty denies that a non-circular justification is available or desirable, while Rawls concedes that his argument for liberal democratic principles has limited scope, as "those who reject constitutional democracy with its criterion of reciprocity will of course reject the very idea of public reason. ... Political liberalism does not engage those who think this way" (2005, 442). In particular, Misak declares that contrary to Rawls and Rorty, "we need to search for an argument which will, if not convince, at least engage, those who reject the liberal problematic" (2000, 30).

Misak argues that Peircean norms about what she calls 'genuine belief' provide grounds for censuring Schmittians and other non-liberals without begging the question – without appealing to our own political and moral standards in responding to them. In brief, she argues that "the requirements of genuine belief show that we must, broadly speaking, be democratic inquirers" (106). Indeed, she contends that what makes a belief genuine rather than mere assertion requires a commitment to egalitarian practices of democratic deliberation. As we will see in the next chapter (§5.2) Robert Talisse commits himself to this justificatory aim in arguing that these Peircean epistemic norms are implicit in any reasonable comprehensive doctrine.

"Believing," Misak begins, "is a practice which is, by its very nature, linked to reason-giving or justification-giving" (74). More strongly, she argues that to assert a belief is to assert it *as true* (57). Asserting a belief as true, however, comes with important normative demands. I not only commit myself to having both sufficient evidence and reasons for my belief; additionally, and more importantly, I commit myself to further inquiry – the ongoing enterprise of ensuring that the reasons and evidence I have are good. "Those obligations can be summarized by saying that if I believe that *p*, I commit myself to defending *p* – to

arguing that I am, and others are, warranted in believing p ” (2004, 12). Therefore, if I am to assert p responsibly I must be prepared to give reasons for my belief and provide evidence for it when challenged by others. Further, I must be willing to continue inquiring into my belief’s warrant by, among other things, exchanging reasons with others.

Misak, of course, recognizes that the Peircean aim of finding beliefs that ‘additional inquiry cannot improve upon’ is practically difficult. However, the demands of the ideal should not count against it, because these demands, however strenuous, do not “interfere with the thought that to believe commits one to engage in the business of justification, whether or not one can live up to the commitment” (12). As an ideal we need only be concerned with its implications, which, on the negative side imply that “failing to incur the commitment, failing to see that one is required to offer reasons for one’s belief, results in the degradation of belief to mere opinion or to dogmatism” (12). It is in light of this norm that Misak thinks we are required to respond to non-liberal challenges. At the same time, the norm provides her grounds for censuring these very people: “Once our Schmittian and other illiberal opponents are brought into the epistemic fold, they can be criticized as failing to really hold beliefs – things which are responsive to reasons. For they refuse to take the reasons of all seriously” (2000, 105).

Thus, insofar as non-liberals ignore the reasons of some others, they compromise their rational standing. In failing to justify their beliefs against the challenges of people outside of their preferred group, they fail to have ‘genuine’ beliefs. In refusing to justify their beliefs to all other epistemic agents, non-liberals compromise their ability to responsibly assert their beliefs. So, in response to her Schmittian foil, Misak thinks we can censure their political views on purely epistemic grounds because “the Schmittian thinks that everyone who is defined as an ‘other’, everyone outside of the defined homogeneous culture, is disqualified from participation” in moral and political deliberation (82). As a result, they could never achieve ‘genuine’ moral or political beliefs. She elaborates by analogy:

A physician who refused to take into account any of the experimental results of, say, the British, would be adopting a very bad method for getting beliefs that would stand up to experience. ¶ Similarly, those engaged in moral deliberation

who denigrate or ignore the experiences of those who are of a certain skin colour, gender, class, or religion are also adopting a method unlikely to reach the truth. And, of course, in moral and political deliberation, we are often discussing how best to live our lives together. (2000, 82)

Thus, unlike Rorty, Misak thinks that she can provide non-circular reasons to live democratically. Summarized succinctly: “the argument against racists and nationalists is that their interest in truth speaks against their racism and nationalism” (2000, 83).

We thus arrive at a justification for democracy, albeit a qualified one. “If we want to arrive at true beliefs,” she claims, “we ought to expose our beliefs to the tests of experience” (83). To the extent that anyone wants to have true moral and political beliefs, she takes them to be committed to egalitarian practices of deliberative democracy. In our commitment to ongoing inquiry into the veracity of our moral and political beliefs we must commit ourselves to exchanging reasons with all others. While she admits that this argument flirts with circularity, as it presumes that racists and nationalists are interested in having true beliefs, she thinks that this worry “evaporates once the pragmatist is explicit that [any mere rational agents] in fact value the truth” (83). And, as people strive to have genuine beliefs, she claims that we all are subject to this norm, implicitly, if not explicitly.

Misak considers this argument non-foundational because it views “standards for truth and objectivity from within human practice – from the way in which we actually go about the business of inquiry” (4). However, while her claim might be non-foundational in a sense, as it does not depend upon transcendental or metaphysical claims, this doesn’t prevent her argument from being foundational in the sense developed in this and the previous chapter. In particular, her demand for a non-circular defense of democracy suggests that she is advancing a foundational argument for democracy, as it requires her to justify political norms on an apolitical basis. In fact, the Peircean epistemic norms she invokes are required, on her view, to provide legitimacy for deliberative democratic practices: we should value democracy “because the deliberative democratic method is more likely to give us true or right or justified answers to our questions” (2008, 94). Our choice of political values follows from considering the epistemic requirements of ‘genuine’ belief.

Eric MacGilvray diagnoses Misak's ambivalence towards foundationalism as the consequence of two competing concerns in her project:

On the one hand, they [epistemic defenses of democracy] are guided by the epistemological intuition that truth claims, and claims to epistemic authority more generally speaking, are necessarily rooted in the beliefs and practices of particular communities of inquiry, and can claim no deeper grounding than this. On the other hand, they are guided by the moral intuition that we must be able to appeal to something more than our own 'parochial' beliefs and practices if we are to respond to (what we take to be) the morally abhorrent beliefs and practices of others. (2007, 5)

On the one hand, Misak rejects non-foundational, or circular, arguments for democracy as inadequate because, as we saw, she thinks they cannot provide strong enough responses and arguments against illiberal views, e.g. racist, sexist, homophobic, Schmittian. On the other hand, upon qualification, her view sounds little different than Rorty's. While a good account, she claims, "gives us something to say to those who denigrate the experience of others" she also admits that "it provides nothing like a knock-down argument against them. It mostly gives us something to say to ourselves about why they are mistaken" (2000, 6). Rorty uses the same words when describing ironism and its limits. Although we cannot provide a non-circular argument against illiberals, this doesn't prevent us from having an account of why we take them to be wrong. Misak mistakenly claims that Rorty is not entitled to give *reasons* for his view at all, yet ultimately agrees with him that the best we can provide as reasons why, from our perspective, we take such views to be mistaken or morally abhorrent. However, unlike Misak, Rorty takes this as grounds to abandon our hopes in a non-circular justification of democracy.

Although Misak agrees that it would be too much for us to expect Carl Schmitt to accept our beliefs and our reasons in support of them – find them to be binding – she claims that we must nonetheless be able to tell ourselves why such views cannot be tolerated. Despite this crucial qualification, Misak simultaneously insists we must say something stronger: that views such as Schmitt's are not only intolerable from our perspective, but irrational in light of the very nature of belief. This latter, more foundational claim is required for Misak to so strongly charge that Carl Schmitt (along with other illiberals) compromises his rationality

by failing to take seriously the beliefs of others.

Stefan Kappner provides another way to get at this tension in Misak's view. He criticizes her contrast between 'genuine' and 'make-believe' beliefs as a point of commentary on Peircean epistemology. The problem, he claims, is that she cooks strong normative content into the very notion of belief, which, for Peirce himself, would rather be an empirical matter. As he puts it, "Peirce does not want to justify the scientific method on the *a priori* grounds of conceptual analysis, but he wants to justify it on empirical grounds, the only grounds acceptable for a 'naturalized' account of inquiry and truth" (2000, 260–1). To relate this criticism to the present discussion, in taking a commitment to democratic deliberation to fall out of the very notion of belief, Misak risks presenting this connection as a conceptual rather than empirical matter. This difference changes the tenor of her tight link between Peircean epistemology and democracy because, as she argues, the mere fact that people have any beliefs should be sufficient to (implicitly) commit them to democratic norms.

MacGilvray similarly suggests that Misak's argument is too foundational. Strict egalitarianism in epistemology, let alone democracy, he claims, cannot follow from the mere fact that people hold beliefs, even if they are trying to be suitably responsible in a Peircean sense. We must inevitably face the question of "which challenges to our existing beliefs are worth attending to" (2007, 6). But if our "concern is to hold true beliefs", then we will have to "face up to the problem of determining who has a disciplined and candid mind and who does not" (6). Once we begin making such judgments, "we must also admit that a commitment to democracy (or more precisely, to strict egalitarianism in inquiry) is not and cannot be an entailment of the mere fact of holding and asserting beliefs" (6).

To return to Misak's strong claim that "the argument against racists and nationalists is that their interest in truth speaks against their racism and nationalism", even if, as we sometimes hope at our most optimistic that racists and nationalists want to have true beliefs, it is unclear whether a purely epistemic censure can sufficiently respond to the problem (2000, 83). Misak's argument requires us to say that the primary failure of people with such morally dubious beliefs is that they are epistemically compromised. While this, of course,

doesn't rule out censoring such people on moral and political grounds, insofar as she thinks a non-question-begging argument is required to denounce such people, the mere observation that we find their beliefs morally abhorrent will be insufficient. Her epistemic defense of democracy requires us to more strongly say that moral and political shortcomings ultimately reflect epistemic failures.

Notice how different this rhetoric is when compared to the more straightforward claim that Carl Schmitt, being a Nazi, has views that simply cannot be accommodated in a liberal democracy. Misak, of course, finds this response unacceptable because "repeating Schmitt's claim that he is not a liberal and does not want to participate in liberal democracy goes nowhere at all" (2000, 30). This might be the case, as stated. However, it goes directly to the heart of this issue: our rejection of his fascist views are undeniably, at least in part, on moral grounds. As liberal democrats, we can tell ourselves why we consider views such as his morally abhorrent. His view is politically reprehensible as it demands that one not only ignore, but actively suppress certain groups. It requires us to suspend being politically and morally accountable to certain groups. Perhaps this failure of accountability also compromises the epistemic function of such politics, too, but in demanding a non-circular argument Misak makes it seem as though we must tell ourselves that such people's primary failure is epistemic. But, as MacGilvray has observed in his more general considerations of epistemic defenses of democracy, this "seems ... to get things backwards. This is what we would *like* to be the case" (2007, 7). Similarly, this implication of Misak's priority of epistemic over political concerns suggests that Rorty might have a point in suggesting that dismissing the views of illiberals can ever truly be such an apolitical matter.³

To conclude this discussion of Misak's epistemic defense, it is worth looking at the related work of David Estlund. Both Misak and Talisse extensively cite Estlund when formulating their arguments. However, both find his account of 'epistemic proceduralism' inadequate as a justification of democracy. The central thesis of *Democratic Authority* (2008) is to show

³ This claim might provide helpful context for appreciating Rorty's claim that a moral, rather than epistemic, understanding of education is vital for advancing liberal democratic culture. See §3.4.

that epistemic features of democratic politics make it superior to other ways of arriving at political decisions. We, he claims, are not merely concerned with fairness in procedures of decision-making in politics. If we were, we would have little reason to prefer democratic deliberation over a simple coin-flip. Additionally, he argues, we value democracy for the epistemic quality of decisions arrived at through democratic means. Like Misak and Talisse, Estlund thinks that such epistemic considerations provide a non-circular argument for democracy. He claims that his goal “is to justify the legitimacy and authority of certain democratic arrangements on the basis of principles that do not simply assume the value or superiority of democracy” (2008, 37).

Despite Estlund’s claim that he can provide a non-circular argument for democracy, there is an important sense in which this is not the case. His primary concern is not whether purely epistemic considerations can provide a foundation for, or imply a commitment to democratic norms. His concern is rather “to show how a concern for the quality of political decisions, properly constrained by other principles, *supports* democratic political arrangements” (1, emphasis mine). These ‘other principles’ are later revealed to be moral constraints. He not only concedes that “people who believe that their own race has a right to rule other races, or who simply desire to subordinate other people to their power, will not accept certain principles about moral and political equality” (4). He more strongly claims that “objections stemming from those unreasonable points of view are morally weightless” (4). His discussion of the legitimacy of democracy applies only to ‘qualified’ points of view, where those who hold stridently non-liberal beliefs are ‘disqualified’ from his justificatory project. Such people, he admits, would not find his account of democratic legitimacy compelling and it would be too much to expect that they do.

This feature of Estlund’s account cause Misak and Talisse to conclude that it is too weak to be an epistemic defense of democracy. In *Democracy After Liberalism* Talisse claims that Estlund’s epistemic proceduralism “fails as a justification of deliberative democracy” because certain groups are not interested in meeting his moral requirements for legitimacy (2005, 103). On this matter, he claims that Estlund begs the question. Estlund, Talisse claims,

does not provide a strong enough reason to say why such people are *wrong* in not being democratic. Thus, although Estlund has occasionally been implicated in contemporary debates surrounding epistemic defenses of democracy, Anderson's characterization of his work as an 'epistemic analysis' of democratic institutions, rather than an epistemic 'defense' is more apt (2006, 9).

In contrast to Estlund, the accounts of democracy that Misak and Talisse 'defend' give pride of place to epistemological considerations. While Estlund provides reason to prefer practices of democratic decision-making over alternatives, a central feature of his account is that democratic procedures provide the right kind of *political* authority. Further, while he takes epistemic features to play an important role in our commitment to democratic ideals, this does not mean that moral or democratic norms are derived from these epistemic concerns. Thus, while Anderson describes Estlund's view as one in which "democratic laws claim legitimate authority in virtue of being the product of procedures that tend to make correct decisions", this is not the whole story, even if it is an important part of it (2008, 129).

Estlund's argument is not intended to show that we should be egalitarian because this yields better decision-making. The justificatory burden for Estlund is primarily question of authority. Democratic institutions can be morally and politically accountable to individuals in the right way but this accountability is not a wholly epistemic matter. He explicitly denounces what he calls "epistocracies" – political rule by 'the wise', the educated, or by experts – for their failure to meet egalitarian moral demands. By tying Estlund's epistemic claims regarding democratic legitimacy to Peircean ideals of rational progress and truth, Misak distorts the justificatory aims of this account and thus makes a stronger, even foundationalist claim that "decisions produced by a democratic deliberative process are made by a rational method and so they are enforceable." (2008, 104).

The work of Estlund is a transparently political project that explores the epistemic features of such politics, but Misak (and Talisse) reverse the order of explanation by putting epistemic considerations at the forefront. On Misak's more radical and, in my opinion, problematic view, epistemic concerns serve as the foundation for her politics. Insofar as

she takes the aim of politics to get things ‘right’, she contends “freedom of association, freedom of speech, etc. are necessary aspects of a deliberation that is suited to getting us the right answers to our questions” (2008, 95). Her argument proceeds in the absence of the moral qualifications that Estlund takes as central. The radicality of Misak’s argument can be clearly seen in the following, admittedly blunt, claim: “deliberative democracy in political philosophy is the right view, because deliberative democracy in epistemology is the right view” (2004, 15).

4.3 Deweyan Inquiry and Epistemic Democracy

Since the publication of Misak’s *Truth, Politics, Morality* (2000) there has been renewed interest in developing a uniquely Deweyan epistemic defense of democracy. Phillip Deen has called for Deweyans to be included in the current discourse on such defenses (2009). David Hildebrand has invoked the work of Dewey in showing “why free speech, association, and universal education would be ‘fundamental’ to a pragmatist: they are fundamental to the epistemic functioning of democratic inquiry” (2011, 593). Larry Hickman has argued that, for Dewey, democratic norms have their “genesis” in his theory of inquiry (2012). Robert Westbrook’s *Democratic Hope* (2005) has attempted to show how Dewey’s work complements the recent work of Misak and Talisse. He claims that Misak’s justification of democracy “would have delighted Dewey” (2005, 51). Misak, too, has since claimed that Dewey would have endorsed her Peircean claims that “we should value them [democratic procedures] because the deliberative democratic method is more likely to give us true or right or justified answers to our questions” (2008, 94).

The primary basis for this line of interpretation traces back to Hilary Putnam’s “A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy”. In this article, Putnam argues that Dewey provided an “epistemological justification of democracy”, which he characterizes as follows: “democracy is not just one form of social life among other workable forms of social life; it is the precondition for the full application of intelligence to the solution of social problems” (1995, 180). Democratic politics, the argument runs, is uniquely capable of accommodating intelligent

habits of inquiry. If we take Dewey's claims about the social importance of inquiry, intelligence, and scientific attitudes and habits of belief seriously, we see that "the need for such fundamental democratic institutions as freedom of thought and speech, follows, for Dewey, from requirements of scientific procedure in general: the unimpeded flow of information and the freedom to offer and to criticize hypotheses" (1995, 188).

While this characterization of Dewey's view is true as far as it goes, the problem with such epistemic defences of democracy is that they are often one-sided and risk overstating the kind of justification that a Deweyan account should be taken to provide. If Deweyans expect a justification of democracy to provide a non-circular argument in favour of democratic political arrangements, of the kind that Misak and Talisse provide, they are going to be disappointed. In fact, some have been. As Gregory Pappas has observed, Matthew Festenstein and David Fott, among others, have been unsatisfied with what they take to be "the incomplete character of Dewey's justification of democracy" (2008, 261). However, he rightly notes that this complaint is predicated upon the assumption "that any reasonable justification must answer the challenges of an imaginary radical skeptic or relativist. But this requirement for justification ... presumes a starting point of philosophical investigation that is not Dewey's" (261).

As foundational, epistemic defenses risk downplaying the fact that while there are epistemic reasons to prefer democracy (and I believe there are, §5.3), there are equally political and moral reasons to prefer the open and fallible methods of inquiry I have described in §2.3. However, to admit that there is a road back from politics to epistemology, as Estlund, Deweyans, and, (somewhat surprisingly) Misak herself, have claimed, means that we can no longer appeal to these epistemic practices as independent, foundational, or non-circular grounds for endorsing political projects. As I argued in the second chapter, such epistemic norms are politically non-neutral and should be recognized as such. Alan Ryan describes the link between epistemology and politics in Dewey's account of education as "a decidedly political conception of education, and there is no point blinking the fact" (1997, 296). To her credit, Misak denies that non-neutrality is a laudable aim of political theory, but this

speaks more to her ambivalence towards foundationalism than anything else. However, as we will see in the next chapter (particularly §5.2), unlike Misak, Robert Talisse contends that his Peircean defense is not only suitably neutral, but uses this argument against Deweyan epistemology as well as grounds for endorsing a ‘Peircean’ defense of democracy.

To return to the question of Dewey’s place in recent debates surrounding epistemic defenses of democracy, Gregory Pappas notes that “if the only way philosophy can provide justification for our democratic aspirations is in the form of a knowledge foundation or from some historical objective standpoint, then Dewey failed as a defender of democracy” (2008, 260). Fortunately, this is not the only option, as he argues that Dewey’s theory of experience provides a basis for his arguments in democracy’s favour. “The move to justify democracy by the quality of lived present experience is consistent with a philosophy that makes experience its starting point. ... This is Dewey’s alternative to justifying democracy by appealing to natural rights, self-interest, or rationality” (287).

He is not alone in this interpretation, as Alison Kadlec, too, has advocated this reading of Deweyan democracy. She claims that “in challenging those who would hold that pragmatism carries no normative weight because it rejects transcendental foundations, Dewey holds that only an operative and intersubjective notion of experience can provide us with the tools we need to confront real challenges and defend meaningful principles” (2007, 21). It is, she says, “only by actively cultivating critical reflection in the complex medium of lived experience that we will be able to meaningfully pursue what Dewey viewed as the core commitments of democracy: liberty of thought and action, equal opportunity to freely develop our capacities, and the cultivation of social intelligence” (13). Michael Eldridge has cited Dewey to the same effect. In his gloss on Dewey’s *Experience and Education*, he claims that on Dewey’s account, “‘democratic social arrangements’ are more effective in bringing about ‘a better quality of human experience’ (LW 13: 17–18)” (2012, 90).

While I am happy to endorse the interpretative claim that Dewey’s justification of democracy is based in his account of the ‘experiential continuum’, this line of argument is limited. There is a lot to be said in favour of this way of reading the relationship of epistemology and

politics in Dewey's work. However, I think that Dewey would not have been as 'enthusiastic' or 'delighted' about epistemic defenses of democracy as Westbrook and Misak suggest. As noted in chapter one, this methodological approach facilitates my discussion in two ways. First, it provides terms that allow for me to meaningfully contrast my account with the work of Misak and Talisse, who advance 'Peircean' theories of a similar kind. Second, tracing the political implications of a Deweyan account of inquiry clarifies the stakes of Rorty's attempt to subsume the epistemic content of Dewey's epistemic account to moral or political norms. Invoking Dewey's full theory of experience does not, I think, help address the stakes of either of these disputes.

As I argued in chapter two, the implications of adopting Deweyan account of inquiry are politically non-neutral. As Rorty rightly claims, it is better suited to liberal and secular projects than conservative and religious ones. In upholding a crucial distinction between values merely acquiesced to and those that are the consequence of inquiry, this account is unapologetically hostile to orthodoxy. Thus, it cannot pretend to be politically non-neutral, nor should it. However, this acknowledgement also rules out the possibility that this theory can provide an epistemic defense of democracy of the kind that Misak and Talisse envision.

Taking seriously Dewey's claims about the importance of scientific intelligence for democratic societies has nonetheless led some to read these claims implying something like an epistemic argument for democracy. But, as Barry Allen warns:

[Dewey's] argument [for democracy] is not the hopeless one of Herbert Spencer, that democracy is scientifically 'proven' to be the proper political organization. Dewey's point is that democracy ... is *analogous* to science, *analogous* to the economy of authority in a scientific community, and can be expected to participate in the rationality of scientific inquiry. One sees the experimental rationality of democracy in its norms of free debate, fallibility, the preference for evidence over other authority, and a willingness to test ideas by their fruits, experimentally, not dogmatically ruling things out in advance." (2010, 78)

Determining how to elaborate this analogy between science and democracy has significant implications for my argument. It provides a basis for understanding how to understand epistemic and political values should be integrated. Rorty contends that this analogy should be understood in purely moral terms: "the only way in which science is relevant to politics is

that the natural scientists provide a good example of social cooperation, of an expert culture in which argumentation flourishes. They thereby provide a model for political deliberation – a mode of honesty, tolerance, and trust” (2007, 103). According to Rorty, Dewey is “not thereby justifying these [democratic, liberal] institutions by reference to more fundamental premises, but the reverse: He ... is putting politics first and tailoring a philosophy to suit” (1991, 178). Kenneth Wain echoes this interpretation, claiming that Dewey put “philosophy at the service of democracy, not the other way round, using it to determine democracy’s epistemological foundations” (2001, 173).

Rorty can easily suggest that we prioritize politics over epistemology as he doesn’t consider the latter a legitimate subject of investigation. However, as Dewey motivates his own non-foundationalism through his theory of inquiry, he (and Deweyans who find his theory of inquiry politically important) cannot so obviously follow Rorty’s proposal. In fact, Dewey’s commitment to an account of inquiry makes the priority of politics over inquiry seem misplaced. Debra Morris has argued that, contrary to Rorty, Dewey’s “efforts to *relate* terms such as ‘science’ and ‘democracy’ cannot be redescribed, without loss, as a *choice*” (1999, 608). Her point can be generalized. To present the relationship between politics and epistemology as a ‘choice’ between prioritizing one or the other misses the force of the non-foundationalism of Deweyan inquiry. It dichotomizes these domains in a way that Dewey’s account of inquiry explicitly rules out. Gregory Pappas has thus observed that “it is perhaps a mistake to ask which of Dewey’s commitments and beliefs was more fundamental [science or politics], for this presupposes the kind of foundational model of justification that he did not adopt” (2008, 296).

While Deweyan inquiry should not be treated as providing a foundational defense of democracy, as Misak and Talisse demand, his theory of inquiry does nonetheless lend itself to an account of democracy that is, at least in part, epistemic. On this matter I am in agreement with Alan Ryan, who claims that “Dewey’s defense of intelligence was intended to be wholly consistent with his defense of democracy” (1997, 25). This is to say that for Dewey, epistemology and politics are interrelated and any question of priority is misplaced.

Conclusion

I have argued against viewing Deweyan inquiry as providing an epistemic defense of democracy, while simultaneously resisting a reading that ‘puts politics first’. In calling for the ‘scientific’ attitudes towards belief, Deweyan inquiry provides what is best characterized as an epistemic articulation of democratic ideals. Democratic life demands that citizens’ beliefs be, in principle, open to critical engagement. However, this requirement should not be taken to imply that the epistemic advantages of open-mindedness, fallibility, and a commitment to ongoing inquiry should be construed as independent grounds for endorsing democratic practices of deliberation.

This conclusion leaves us with a vision closer to the work of David Estlund and Elisabeth Anderson, who provide ‘epistemic accounts’ of democracy – accounts that attempt to highlight the political importance of epistemic notions without taking them to underwrite or legitimize politics. A commitment to a democratic culture of deliberation has epistemic implications, just as the Deweyan account of inquiry provided in chapter two has moral and political implications. But to think that either of these can be invoked to provide a non-circular justification of the other is a pipe dream.

Despite serving as the starting point for recent attempts to read Dewey as contributing to recent debates on epistemic defenses of democracy, it is often overlooked that Hilary Putnam provides a more nuanced picture of epistemology and politics than Westbrook and Misak claim. He claims, “if a value as general as the value of democracy is to be rationally defended in the way Dewey advocates, the materials to be used in the defence cannot be circumscribed in advance. There is no one field of experience from which all the considerations relevant to the evaluation of democracy come” (1995, 189).⁴ Indeed, I think such a pluralistic justification

⁴ Although Misak explicitly claims that her epistemic defense does not imply that there are not other grounds for lauding democratic arrangements, the justificatory stakes of this argument run contrary to this. Her argument is intended to show that epistemic considerations are sufficient for justifying democratic norms. If this weren’t the case, these considerations would be unable to serve as the independent, non-circular grounds for a commitment to democratic deliberation that she hopes for. Thus, while her epistemic defense doesn’t rule out the possibility of justification of democracy on other grounds, these must be less important than epistemic ones.

is required for a non-foundational view of politics.

Taking Dewey's theory of inquiry seriously also means that we cannot be Rortian ironists – we cannot put politics first. Nonetheless, and contrary to Deweyans such as Phillip Deen, neither should it be seen as contributing to Misak and Talisse's projects of justifying democratic politics on purely epistemic ground. These notions of inquiry and intelligence are unapologetically politically non-neutral. While, like Rorty, the non-neutrality of these epistemic notions means that we can at best provide a non-foundational account of liberal democratic values, unlike Rorty, the relationship between Deweyan inquiry and democracy nonetheless provides a vision in which epistemic matters play a crucial role. While I have not yet responded to the Rorty's attempt to view Dewey's epistemic claims as primarily moral and political (§3.4), I will deliver on this promise in the next chapter by arguing that Deweyan norms of inquiry and intelligence should be understood as simultaneously epistemic and moral, befitting the synergistic view of epistemology and politics I have described.

Chapter 5

Perfectionism, Pluralism, and Deweyan Democracy

IN THE PREVIOUS chapter I showed how the argumentative strategy common to Robert Talisse and Cheryl Misak is foundational in seeking to derive the legitimacy of political norms (in this case, democratic ones) from purely epistemic norms. Substantive problems follow from this approach – problems that, I argue, are addressed by a Deweyan account of the synergy of epistemic and political concerns. Democracy and inquiry are non-foundationally integrated, as the adoption of practices of inquiry enhances the quality of democracy, and the adoption of democracy facilitates our practices of inquiry. In rejecting Deweyan democracy, these neo-Peircean accounts, especially that of Robert Talisse, overlook this feature of a Deweyan account, which allows it to uniquely respond to concerns of pluralism.

Talisse charges that Deweyan accounts of democracy are perfectionist. He claims they depend upon substantial moral commitments which compromise their ability to accommodate pluralism, thus running contrary to a basic feature of modern democratic societies. In characterizing democracy as ‘a way of life’, and taking ‘growth’ to be a substantive aim of morality and politics, Deweyan democracy reveals itself to be a variety of comprehensive liberalism, making it too ‘thick’ to provide an adequate basis for contemporary democracy. Similarly, he argues that Deweyan accounts of inquiry and intelligence are no less unsuited to democratic life. To the extent that ‘intelligence’ tells us something substantial about which beliefs can be reasonably held, Talisse takes this notion to preclude the possibility of reasonable moral and political disagreement.

Deweyans have responded to these charges. Some, such as Michael Eldridge, have argued that Talisse has erred in considering the identification of democracy as ‘a way of life’ to be a substantive and problematic norm. Similar arguments have also been advanced regarding Dewey’s notions of ‘growth’ as well as ‘intelligence.’ My argument is similar to

the latter approach, as I claim that Deweyan inquiry is not as thick as Talisse says – it is not perfectionist in the way that he claims. However, my purpose is not purely defensive. In this chapter I show how the Deweyan account of inquiry provided in chapter 2 not only addresses his concerns about pluralism but provides a superior model to Talisse’s Peircean politics.

Talisse’s account depends on the chimerical ideal that some neutral grounds is available to serve as the foundation for political discourse. This feature follows directly from his foundationalism, as it implies a false neutrality for its epistemic claims and to that extent is misleading in its claim to provide a more suitable ground for pluralistic democratic ideals than Deweyan epistemology. I contrast this account with the Deweyan vision initially proposed in chapter 2. On this view, common ground should be understood as the consequence of political negotiation rather than a neutral foundation that can be appealed to in advance of any political dispute.

On the account I propose, the epistemic standards involved in political deliberation are irreducibly political and cannot be invoked to justify the politics they facilitate. However, such standards cannot be left outside of legitimate political discourse either because they are both politically contestable and politically significant. While Talisse is right that a commitment to inquiry, on the Deweyan model, implies that certain ways of justifying beliefs are better than others, this is not equivalent to the claim that only certain stances on political and ethical matters are justifiable. I argue that, contrary to Talisse’s claims, a Deweyan account has no problem accommodating political pluralism. Further, by combining political non-neutrality with the demand that any claim (including norms of inquiry) be open to experimental development, my Deweyan account of inquiry represents an strategy for engaging with pluralism in a democratic society.

5.1 Talisse’s ‘Farewell’ to Deweyan Democracy

In *Democracy After Liberalism* (2005), Robert Talisse argues that there is a tension at the heart of contemporary liberal democratic theory. On the one hand the goal is to provide a

“robust normative account of the legitimacy of liberal democracy” (2005, 9).¹ On the other hand there is the recognition that liberal democratic societies are becoming increasingly pluralistic – “home to an increasing diversity of views, lifestyles, and conceptions of the good” (9). The worry is that if one provides a ‘robust’ account of democratic legitimacy, it is likely to depend upon norms that are controversial, i.e., ones that citizens could reasonably reject. In such a case not all citizens could be expected to endorse such accounts and to impose these norms upon such people would be coercive. Thus the cost of achieving legitimacy is to compromise pluralism and, similarly, the price of accommodating pluralism is the loss of a robust account of liberal democratic values.

Talisce discusses John Rawls’ project in *Political Liberalism* to highlight this point. Rawls himself seems aware of, but unconcerned with, the tension Talisce highlights in contrasting his ‘political’ conception of liberalism with ‘comprehensive’ accounts. Comprehensive accounts of liberalism, he claims, establish political legitimacy by upholding certain substantive political or moral norms. Such accounts rest upon specific views of human nature, morality, and politics. Insofar as they depend on such norms to establish their legitimacy, they also rule out the possibility of reasonable disagreement on these matters.

Rather than requiring that political agents set aside their ‘comprehensive doctrines’ – their beliefs regarding personal and public goods and their standards for evaluating these – Rawls proposes that liberal democratic principles should be justified by overlapping consensus. The result is what he calls his ‘political’ conception of liberalism. Diverse groups with differing and incompatible values and evaluative standards should (he argues) be able to agree on a broadly liberal package of values and procedures in order to co-exist in a pluralistic democracy. Of course, not all groups are interested in peaceful co-existence or cooperation with those who don’t share their values. As Rawls says, not all comprehensive doctrines are *reasonable*. But when it comes to such groups Rawls is unconcerned that they would find his account of democracy unappealing: it is not addressed to them. His argument for political

¹ I provided an characterization of what Talisce thinks such an account demands in §4.2, and will discuss this further in §5.2

liberalism is only intended to engage those who hold reasonable comprehensive doctrines.

Talisso considers this feature unsatisfactory, as ‘reasonable’ refers to those who already endorse some form of democratic ideal in their commitment to tolerance and pluralism. Rawls, he claims, only accommodates pluralism by refusing to provide a ‘robust’ account of democracy’s legitimacy. In justifying democracy by appealing to ideals “implicit in the public political culture of a democratic society”, Rawls is left with nothing to say to non-democrats. Rawls’ justification, in other words, “could be a *justification* in only a highly attenuated sense of the term” (2007, 85).

If Rawls’ defense of democracy is too thin, Deweyan accounts of democracy are too ‘thick.’² As ‘a way of life’, Deweyan accounts of democracy carry substantial and controversial moral, political, and philosophical commitments that circumscribe the possibility of reasonable disagreement, a crucial and ineliminable feature of genuinely democratic societies. Talisso argues Deweyans should recognize that their account is a variety of comprehensive liberalism, incapable of providing an adequate account of democratic legitimacy. Such accounts, he charges, will inevitably invoke controversial values and thus be anti-pluralist.

Deweyans have not helped their cause when it comes to this challenge. Matthew Festenstein and Steven Fesmire, among others, explicitly elaborate Dewey’s politics as an extension of his moral thought. Deweyan democracy, according to such commentators, is not only ‘a way of life’ but also ‘the ideal moral community’. “Just as gestating organisms must be nourished to survive,” Fesmire claims, “a nurturing natural and social environment is required for human well-being” (2003, 21). Thus democracy, according to such Deweyans, refers not only to the specific institutions of universal suffrage, free voting, and so on, but is more importantly a moral community that facilitates individual self-realization and moral growth. Michael Eldridge has aptly elaborated this ideal: “democracy is more than procedures ... a truly democratic society will embed these procedures in a shared way of life. Its democratic politics will reflect the democratic values of the society, and vice versa. A group’s democratic

² Talisso’s use of this term should not to be confused with Michael Walzer’s sense of ‘thickness’. For Walzer, ‘thick’ is largely synonymous with a position being socially-embedded. For Talisso, a ‘thick’ view is one that rests upon substantial moral or political commitments and is thus perfectionist.

values must find expression in democratic procedures” (2002, 270). Matthew Festenstein, too, after noting that Dewey’s politics “hinges” on his notion of moral growth, concedes that this account “does not appease a critic who is inclined to see a greater variety of ways of flourishing, which may or may not be connected to Dewey’s (or any) ethical beliefs, than this account allows” (1997, 62).

Given the preponderance of these interpretations of Dewey’s work, it is easy to see why Talisse considers Deweyan accounts of democracy comprehensive and perfectionist. Indeed, he explicitly endorses Festenstein’s interpretation of Dewey’s political philosophy. “I believe that since Festenstein is correct about Dewey, Deweyan democracy is, for Rawlsian reasons, nonviable” (2010a, 45). He, however, draws the opposite conclusion than Festenstein. Where Festenstein concludes that the tension between these views reveals a problem in Rawls’ account, Talisse notes that “Festenstein is not only rejecting the Rawlsian requirement, but denying the core liberal commitment that coercion stands in need of justification” (2009, 93). This, he thinks, provides sufficient reason to reject Deweyan democracy.

Talisse articulates and endorses a Rawlsian anti-perfectionist ideal in *Democracy After Liberalism* as follows: “the liberal democratic state ... must remain neutral or impartial on matters concerning the fundamental issues over which free citizens are expected to disagree” (2005, 6). He also describes the ideal of neutrality in liberal democracies in these terms: “state action and policy must be neutral among the various conceptions of the good which citizens may rightfully adopt” (20). While Talisse is perhaps uncharitable in taking phrases like ‘the democratic values’ of Deweyan democracy to imply morally substantial notions of growth and individual perfection, his worry is legitimate: to configure democratic society around these ideals would be coercive for those who do not endorse them. In doing so, Deweyan democracy would impose norms upon citizens that they could reasonably reject. Additionally, insofar as the value of democracy is tied to ideals such as ‘growth’, Deweyans are unable to legitimize their vision of democratic arrangements to those who dispute this norm. He concludes that Deweyans must advance a comprehensive and thus anti-pluralistic vision of democratic society.

While Deweyans are undoubtedly correct to say that Talisse has misrepresented their positions, few have articulated responses that address the stakes of his criticism. This has only been exacerbated by the fact that Talisse states his critique in terms of ‘thickness’ rather than the more established terminology of political philosophy – perfectionism. Mark Von Hollebeke, for example, responds to Talisse’s challenge by arguing that Deweyan norms of ‘growth’ and viewing democracy as ‘a way of life’ are not as ‘thick’ as Talisse insinuates (2009). But whether this is the case or not, this response fails to directly address the issue: if these norms are invoked to justify democracy, such a justification will not be adequate for those who dispute these moral ends. Such Deweyan accounts therefore fail to legitimize democracy in a pluralistic society – one in which citizens should be expected to reasonably disagree about many fundamental values.

The possibility of political pluralism poses a dilemma for Deweyan accounts: they can either build notions of ‘intelligence’ and ‘growth’ into the very idea of ‘reasonability’, or recognize that the justification they provide for adopting democratic forms of politics will fail to engage otherwise ‘reasonable’ individuals. In the first case we fail to explain why democracy should matter to people who don’t share specifically Deweyan moral values. In the second case, we configure democratic society around norms like ‘growth’ – making them non-negotiable and beyond ‘reasonable disagreement’. Then these norms are imposed upon (at least some) people, contrary to the liberal principle of non-coercion. Talisse suggests that Deweyans should “recognize that [their] conception of democracy, along with its constituent vision of human flourishing, is but one reasonable comprehensive doctrine upon many” (2007, 186).

Gregory Pappas provides a more powerful line of response to Talisse’s challenge by arguing that it is a mistake to read Dewey as ‘grounding’ political norms on ethical theory. It is worth quoting him at length:

Dewey’s critics and sympathizers ... presuppose that Dewey’s politics is grounded in Dewey’s ethics because in the latter one finds the ultimate criterion of all value judgments. They presuppose that for Dewey self-realization, human fulfillment, or growth are the goods ultimately served by democracy. It is hard to deny that Dewey was to some extent concerned with all of these goods, but to assume

that any of them is the underlying and final telos is to fail to do justice to the radically pluralistic and contextualist view of Dewey's mature ethical thought and philosophy. (2008, 289–90)

Rather than debating the relative 'thickness' of these norms, Pappas' suggestion is that we should deny that notions such as 'growth' and 'self-improvement' serve the foundational role that Talisse assumes. I think that this is the most promising line of response to Talisse's charges against Deweyan democracy.

Talisse anticipates this line of response in responding to Melvin Rogers. By refusing to rest democracy on the notion of 'growth', he claims "there would no longer be any sense to the slogan 'democracy is a way of life.'" (2009, 105). In which case, "I would see no reason why [Rogers and others] should want to claim that [their] view is Deweyan at all" (105). To uphold this demand, however, forces an essentialism and foundationalism upon a thoroughly anti-essentialist and anti-foundational philosophy. In providing his own 'Peircean' account, Talisse himself explicitly notes that he is not giving Peirce's account of democracy. Although Peirce himself provided a metaphysics to supplement his account of inquiry, Talisse contends that his evasion of Peircean metaphysics should not count against his view being sufficiently 'Peircean.' The same liberty should be extended to Deweyan accounts (§1.4).

As a preliminary to his claim that Deweyan democracy is too thick to accommodate pluralism *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Democracy* undertakes to show how Dewey's articulation of pragmatism carries substantive philosophical baggage. This includes not only the theory of experience that Pappas treats as central to Dewey's conception of democracy (§4.3).³ More importantly, he includes Dewey's theory of inquiry and intelligence. Talisse's dismissal of Deweyan inquiry is different than his charge against Dewey's account of morality and politics. Although he takes this account to be anti-pluralist, Talisse's argument against Deweyan inquiry is not only that it rests upon reasonably rejectable norms, but that it cannot provide an epistemic defense of democracy. While I agree with this claim and

³ "Dewey's views about democracy cannot be separated from his plea that we accept a certain metaphysics, that is, that we do not turn away from or ignore the complexity, pluralism, and uncertainty of reality" (Pappas 2008, 267).

remain untroubled by it (§4.3), it is nonetheless worth outlining Talisse’s argument as it provides context for Talisse’s positive view.

That epistemic considerations factor into Deweyan accounts of democracy should be unsurprising (§4.3). As Michael Eldridge explains, “democracy ... for Dewey is political machinery – frequent elections, universal suffrage, majority rule, protection of minorities – but it is more than these. It is also, and more fundamentally, the day-to-day practice of ‘consultation, persuasion, negotiation, cooperative intelligence’” (2002, 270). David Hildebrand has similarly elaborated Deweyan democracy as an epistemic community: “Democracy is a way of life that empowers communities (and individuals) to express and secure their values by engaging in the epistemic process of social or public inquiry” (2011, 596). While, on both accounts, democracy is ‘a way of life’, the meaning of this phrase is primarily epistemic rather than moral. I will elaborate my own understanding of these epistemic demands in §5.3. For now it is more important to attend to Talisse’s criticism.

Alongside other features of Dewey’s philosophy, Talisse finds his theory of inquiry and the commitment to ‘scientific experimentation’ too philosophically controversial to provide a basis for democratic politics. “Dewey has built into his conception of inquiry an entire system of philosophical commitments” (2007, 18). This charge echoes Richard Rorty’s contention that Dewey’s use of epistemology masks an ultimately contentious political project, as the theory of inquiry is loaded and politically non-neutral – better suited to some political orientations than others (§2.4, §3.4). Although Talisse is fundamentally at odds with Rorty, he nonetheless agrees with him in considering this feature of Dewey’s philosophy suspect. If Deweyan practices of inquiry were enshrined in democratic institutions, it would undermine the very pluralism which such institutions are supposed to respect.

5.2 Talisse’s Peircean Alternative

In responding to what he takes to be the shortcomings of Deweyan politics, Talisse suggests that it is time for a Peircean vision of democracy to supplant it as the dominant political framework for pragmatists. Drawing on the work of Cheryl Misak, in particular, he contends

that the account of inquiry and truth involved in Peircean pragmatism makes it especially well-suited to contemporary democratic society. To see why this is the case, it is worth returning to Rawls on pluralism and political justification.

In a pluralistic society, Rawls claims, we cannot assume that citizens will share values or evaluative standards. Thus, in order to avoid privileging any one of these, he suggests that public reasoning and justification requires reasons that any potential interlocutors would accept. The reasons we provide in politics cannot rest upon any particular evaluative standard or assume any particular values, but should rather be neutral between these. He claims, “our exercise of political power is proper only when we sincerely believe that the reasons we would offer for our political actions ... are sufficient, and we also reasonably think that other citizens might also reasonably accept those reasons” (1997, 771). To exercise political power in the absence of this assumption risks coercion as it might impose values upon those who do not endorse them.

Talisie takes seriously Rawls’ concerns about legitimacy and coercion, particularly his suggestion that appeals to substantive moral commitments risks violating liberal principles of neutrality and non-coercion and therefore cannot be appealed to in a justification of democracy. But where Rawls takes this injunction as reason to seek a more qualified political justification of democracy via ‘overlapping consensus’, Talisie argues that it does not rule out an epistemic justification of democratic values. To this end, Talisie employs Misak’s considerations about the demands of ‘genuine’ belief (described in §4.2) to provide an apolitical (and thus purportedly neutral) justification of democracy – one that he thinks is immune to Rawls’ concerns. Borrowing David Estlund’s term, he considers his Peircean account *aspirationalist* without being perfectionist.⁴

Talisie describes these epistemic aspirations as follows: “on an epistemic view, democratic deliberation aims to track the truth, or arrive at correct political policies; the epistemic

⁴ “Nonetheless, epistemic perfectionism is still a perfectionism, it still denies the priority of the right to the good. The liberal worry is that no such view can properly respect individual rights. The argument is that if individual rights are derived from a conception of the good of any sort, then rights will be mere instruments and as such contingent, manipulable, and ultimately impotent” (2007, 399).

quality of the results of democratic deliberation generates their legitimacy” (2005, 102). While his Peircean politics invokes substantive norms to legitimize democratic politics, Peircean democracy does not impose these norms upon anyone: “the Peircean view,” merely “identifies epistemic norms that one already accepts simply in virtue of being an epistemic agent” (2009, 100). In short, the Peircean view of inquiry and democracy rests upon norms that cannot be reasonably rejected. All ‘reasonable’ positions – those that must be accommodated and addressed by a viable account of pluralistic democracy – are already implicitly committed to these ‘thin’ epistemic norms regarding “genuine” belief. “The Peircean conception of democracy appeals to only those norms that are already presupposed by the very idea of reasonable rejection. Accordingly, it is composed of norms that are not themselves reasonably rejectable” (2007, 87). Because of this purported feature of the Peircean account of deliberative democracy, Talisse considers it capable of providing a middle ground for accommodating pluralism while providing a robust account of the legitimacy of democratic societies.

As should be apparent, this argument hinges upon the notion of ‘reasonability’ and it is worth attending to this term. For Rawls, the term ‘reasonable’ has a distinctively political meaning. “Citizens are reasonable when, viewing one another as free and equal in a system of social cooperation ... they are prepared to offer one another fair terms of cooperation” (2005, 446). Given the fact of reasonable pluralism, to be reasonable view also demands, among other things, tolerance of those who disagree on matters of fundamental value. Rawls considers ‘reasonable’ views to be the only ones to which we are required to justify liberal democratic principles. Concerns that we might be imposing political principles upon those who would reject them are only concerns in the case of such positions. This background is worth keeping in mind as Talisse’s Peircean notion of reasonability fundamentally changes the complexion of this notion in his account.

Talisse rejects Rawls’ political notion of reasonability because, he argues, it is ‘thick’ – it rests upon a prior commitment to specific moral and political ideals. Insofar as Rawls’ account presupposes values such as the freedom and equality of persons, it leaves him

unable to justify democracy. A position is only reasonable “insofar as its content is generally compatible with the basic commitments of a liberal democracy” (2005, 114). Talisse thus concludes that Rawls “must commit to some deep philosophical claims and thus abandon the idea of a political liberalism” (63). Indeed, he claims that “any society whose institutions presuppose any particular philosophical doctrine – even a decidedly *liberal* one – will *ipso facto* be illiberal” (57).

To meet the high justificatory demand of a presupposition-free account of democracy Talisse substitutes a politically and philosophically ‘uncontroversial’ notion of reasonability that rests upon purely epistemic norms. The consequences of this substitution are two-fold. First, it radicalizes Rawls’ principle of non-coercion in the context of justifying democracy. Second, it provides Talisse with what he takes to be grounds for an epistemic defense of democracy. In the last chapter I argued that this strategy is foundational as it ultimately attempts to ground the legitimacy of political norms upon supposedly apolitical epistemic requirements. I argued for this conclusion primarily in connection with Misak’s argument. While Talisse lauds this feature of Misak’s argument, it is worth revisiting this discussion to draw out the unique features of Talisse’s foundational argument for democracy.⁵

Talisse considers anything short of a philosophically uncontroversial articulation of democratic values to be inadequate if one is to justify democracy while simultaneously doing justice to liberal principles of consent and non-coercion. Indeed, he argues that Rawls himself runs afoul of these very principles by providing a justification of liberalism that hinges on a notion of reasonability that not everyone would reasonably accept.⁶ More radically, this also means that a justification of democracy that presuppose *any* moral or political content will be incompatible with the principle of non-coercion. This incompatibility is seen most clearly in Talisse’s response to Matthew Festenstein, who charges that Talisse’s Peircean account of democracy is no less philosophically controversial than the Deweyan

⁵ Unlike Misak, Talisse has no qualms about advancing a foundationalist view. In fact, he strangely dismisses anti-foundationalist views for their dogmatism. See *Democracy After Liberalism* (2005), pg. 72–3 for his discussion of this strange claim.

⁶ ‘Reasonable’ here should be understood in Talisse’s epistemic terms, rather than Rawls’ political ones.

ones he denounces. While Talisse is (hypothetically) willing to make this concession, he takes its implications to be devastating for any account of democratic legitimacy:

It seems to me that even if one concedes Festenstein’s case for thinking that the Peircean view is, like all liberal conceptions, comprised of norms that are every bit as reasonably contestable as those which constitute Deweyan democracy, there is still the question of whether this is bad news for the Rawlsian requirement [of non-coercion] or good news for anarchism. If the Rawlsian requirement cannot be met, then we must conclude that there could be no such thing as a state that coerces only when justified. This is the central thesis of anarchism. (2009, 92)

The problem with this way of construing the issue is that it rules out any possibility for a middle ground between anarchism and a universalizable justification of democratic action. Whereas both Rawls and Estlund, for example, qualify the scope of their respective justifications for democratic norms, the only alternative to anarchism that Talisse is willing to admit is a radically unqualified justification – one that is binding not merely upon a group of political agents, but one that is binding upon all rational agents.

The consequence of this dichotomy between anarchism and foundationalism is not merely that one must choose between the two: Talisse’s demand for foundations is itself radical in demanding philosophically ‘uncontroversial’ premises, i.e. ones that are not reasonably rejectable in the epistemic sense specified above. Talisse’s requirement for justificatory adequacy rests upon a radicalized version of Rawls’ notion of the pluralism that political theories should be concerned with – one that is ultimately required to hold for all belief-having agents. Although I doubt that uncontroversial beliefs exist, I will rather take issue with his candidates for these uncontroversial grounds for politics – the “deliberative virtues” which, he argues, are not reasonably rejectable (2005, 10). His admittedly non-exhaustive and preliminary list includes the following:

HONESTY – An honest deliberator is “fair minded and deliberates ‘in good faith’ ” (2005, 112). She views her beliefs as fallible and revisable, and “follows reasons and argument, not bare interests” (112).

MODESTY – A modest deliberator recognizes that political proposals are mere hypotheses and might not work as intended when implemented. She seeks ameliorative solutions to problems (112).

CHARITY – Charitable deliberators are “suspicious of polarizations ... and easy solutions” (113). They are “willing to listen responsibly to opposing views and to consider them fairly” (113).

INTEGRITY – A deliberator with integrity “strives to be fair to his [political] opponents” and be sympathetic to their concern (113). He is committed to attempt to persuade others or, at least, reach compromises. In other words, she will avoid being autocratic (113).

While I agree these these are ideals are laudable, and likely important ones for the longevity of democratic culture, these are all subject to the arguments that Rorty deploys against Deweyan inquiry.⁷ In chapter 3 I argued that Rorty’s attempt to de-epistemologize Dewey rests upon the contention that Dewey’s account of inquiry and his associated calls for experimentalism and fallibility boil down to little more than moral norms such as honesty and open-mindedness. While I will later resist this reduction on behalf of Deweyan inquiry, it poses a problem for Talisse’s epistemic defense of democracy. Insofar as his justification is predicated on the requirement for non-circular and uncontroversial – i.e., not reasonably rejectable – grounds for valuing democratic politics, Talisse is committed to viewing all of the above virtues (and perhaps some others) as being purely epistemic. Setting aside Rorty’s own eliminativist conclusions, it is problematic for Talisse’s project for these norms to presuppose any moral content, as it would undermine their supposed justificatory role. Even to concede the more moderate point that these virtues are simultaneously both epistemic and moral would imply that they can no longer serve as non-question-begging reasons to prefer democracy.

Indeed, I think this is the case. The problem is that on the Peircean account common to Misak and Talisse, both belief and inquiry are understood intersubjectively. Belief is only ‘genuine’ when set in the context of an ongoing community of inquirers. However, upon elaboration, supposedly politically non-controversial virtues such as modesty and honesty sound little different than Rawls’ demand that a ‘reasonable’ position be tolerant and fair towards those who hold differing views of the good.

Recall that Talisse’s issue with Rawls’ account of reasonability was that it implied a commitment to democratic ideals of tolerance and cooperation. If there is to be a significant

⁷ “The virtues inherent in a deliberative model of democratic citizenship must be cultivated if we are to come to good beliefs about how to treat others, how to resolve conflicts, and how to arrange society. The model of democratic citizenship which results is one that makes democratic citizenship part of a culture of justification” (Misak 2008, 103).

difference from Rawls' position, these virtues must be understandable and endorsable in solely epistemic terms – ones that nobody could 'reasonably reject'. Indeed, he claims that "although it [Peircean democracy] is a substantive conception of democracy that prescribes for the state a formative role in the cultivation of certain character traits and norms among its citizens, it sees this role as exclusively *epistemic* rather than moral" (2007, 87). The problem is that even if 'the state' views the fostering of these epistemic virtues as worthwhile for epistemic reasons, they have moral content that cannot simply be viewed as a byproduct of endorsing those epistemic norms. That this is not a purely epistemic matter is especially clear in the case of Talisse's discussion of 'integrity'. This epistemic ideal is elaborated with explicit reference to the politically loaded commitment to democratic ideals of cooperation and tolerance that, in Rawls, he found inadequate to properly justify democracy: "democratic deliberation requires of citizens the ability to continue working *cooperatively* on a problem despite set backs, complexity, failures, and adversity; I call this the virtue of integrity" (Talisse 2005, 113, emphasis mine).

While Talisse endorses Misak's demand for a non-circular justification of democratic norms in his claim that "the justification of democracy follows directly from what it is to hold a belief" (104), his elaboration of these epistemic demands ultimately smuggles in moral content. Insofar as these Peircean virtues govern our interactions with others and rest upon a commitment to egalitarianism I doubt they can provide non-circular grounds for endorsing democracy. Although Talisse is right to claim that "the commitment to debate and deliberation is a commitment to the basic features of democracy" (105), these epistemic commitments cannot provide non-circular, politically uncontroversial grounds for democratic politics.

Talisse's response to this charge would likely be that these virtues are epistemic insofar as they are constitutive of a proper (Peircean) respect for truth. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, this epistemic goal alone does not imply strict egalitarianism. When our beliefs are challenged by others, we must face the question of "which challenges to our existing beliefs are worth attending to" (MacGilvray 2007, 6). To do this we must determine

“who has a disciplined and candid mind and who does not” (2007, 6). Yet if we make such judgments, we must admit that we are no longer being strictly egalitarian. To establish the requisite egalitarian premise of his justification of democracy, some moral content is required. Yet based on Talisse’s treatment of Rawls, this would also imply that the argument is either be circular or politically controversial (or perhaps both).

None of these criticisms are intended to call into question these epistemic or moral ideals. However, it is to suggest that Talisse expects too much of these deliberative virtues if he thinks they provide non-circular, politically uncontroversial grounds for democratic values. Additionally, it might also suggest that Rawls and Estlund are correct in qualifying the scope of their respective principles of political legitimation, as it is unlikely that any moral or political principles could meet Talisse’s universal acceptance requirement.

Rorty advances a relevant criticism of Rawls that is worth mentioning in connection with Talisse’s defense of democracy:

Rawls’ notion of what is reasonable, in short, confines membership of the society of peoples to societies whose institutions encompass most of the hard-won achievements of the West in the two centuries since the Enlightenment. It seems to me that Rawls cannot both reject historicism and invoke this notion of reasonableness. (2007, 48)

Rorty’s concern is that Rawls’ articulation of ‘reasonable’ is too narrow – it is likely to ignore a massive segment of humanity. It also seemingly put an ahistoric, epistemic spin on contingent facts about the history of political progress. However, this charge is unfair to the role this notion plays in Rawls’ thought, for whom ‘reasonability’ qualifies the scope of political legitimation and principles of non-coercion. While Rorty is right that this criterion is politically restrictive, Talisse swings too far to the opposite end of the spectrum: he makes ‘reasonable’ synonymous with ‘rational belief’ or even belief simpliciter.

The epistemic problem that Rorty implausibly attributes to Rawls is a real problem for Talisse. His account forces a purely epistemic response to those who reject his supposedly ‘non-reasonably-rejectable’ Peircean norms. He must say, contrary to Rawls, that such people are not only politically ‘unreasonable’ but are, more problematically, in some sense irrational – compromising their status as rational agents insofar as they are not committed

to democratic ideals. It thus becomes unclear whether Talisse's account can fairly address those who do not endorse his Peircean norms, whom, it seems, he has no alternative but to criticize as irrational.

Talisse's Peircean account of inquiry is morally thicker than he assumes it to be. As a result, he cannot treat those epistemic norms he describes as non-circular grounds for the political philosophy he proposes. By upholding those epistemic norms as incapable of reasonable rejection, Talisse's vision is revealed to be foundationalist and thus unable to respect the limits he places upon politics. Those who dispute these norms are not merely politically suspect, on his account, but are epistemically compromised. As such, his account treats certain political ideals as beyond political negotiation and contestability, which is precisely what he criticizes Dewey and 'Deweyans' for.

5.3 Preferring Deweyan Epistemology

The stakes of Talisse's critique of Deweyan inquiry is that it provides flawed grounds for an epistemic defense of democracy. His *Pragmatist Politics* assumes that Peircean pragmatism is theoretically 'thin', whereas Deweyan accounts are 'thick' and unsuited to provide a philosophical foundation for democracy. While I happily concede that Deweyan democracy should not be seen as engaged in this justificatory project, this is not because Deweyan accounts are deficient, but because these justifications are too strong and, consequently, politically suspect. Although the Deweyan account of inquiry is undeniably politically non-neutral, this does not mean that it is anti-pluralist. Contrary to Peircean accounts, Deweyan inquiry has the resources to make its non-neutrality a virtue rather than a deficiency. To show how this is the case, it is an appropriate time to respond to Rorty's reading of Deweyan inquiry.

Rorty's challenge to Deweyan inquiry is that if there is a connection between epistemology and politics, the politics do all the work. The consequence of giving up on notions such as 'intelligence' and 'rationality' in an account of liberal democratic values, Rorty claims, better facilitates the realization of democratic ideals. Indeed, he suggests that we "'poeticize'

rather than ‘rationalize’ or ‘scientize’ society” (1989, 53). This is not to say that Rorty sees no use for the latter terms, but he takes their significance to be moral: “to advise people to be rational is, on the view I am offering, simply to suggest that somewhere among their shared beliefs and desires there may be enough resources to permit agreement on how to coexist without violence” (2007, 53–4). To value this sense of ‘rationality’ is, like the Rawlsian notion of reasonability, to say that we hope for citizens willing to exchange beliefs and coexist with their peers. The seemingly epistemological import of ‘rationality’ is thus little more than the moral and political ideal of liberal citizenship.

Although I argued that Rorty’s challenge, if tenable, undermines Talisse’s justificatory project, it does not have this implication for Deweyan inquiry. A Deweyan account, as non-foundational, does not affirm any priority for epistemic over moral or political considerations. Nonetheless, a positive account is required against Rorty’s challenge that we should see epistemic ideals of inquiry, intelligence, and experimentation as purely moral or political.

While I do not deny that there is a moral dimension to these Deweyan notions (§2.4, §4.3), I deny that these ideals have exclusively moral significance. Like Matthew Festenstein, I suggest that “there are problems for a transformative politics which Dewey’s intellectual style addresses and which Rorty’s does not” (2001, 203). However, unlike Festenstein, I consider Dewey’s advantage to be in his epistemology rather than his account of democratic selfhood. The open-mindedness and experimental attitudes that Dewey advocates as ‘scientific’ are more epistemically loaded than Rorty’s moral rendering of the term ‘openness’ captures. Consider, for example, Dewey’s description of open-mindedness from *Democracy and Education*: “openness of mind means accessibility of mind to any and every consideration that will throw light upon the situation that needs to be cleared up, and that will help determine the consequences of acting this way or that” (MW9: 182). It is easy to read this statement as trivially suggesting that one must pay attention to matters that are germane to the subjects one is inquiring into. But if the broader account of Deweyan inquiry is kept in mind, the openness here equally, and more importantly, demands a willingness to act. Experimentalism, at least as Dewey understands it, demands that one be actively engaged

in the process of establishing the warrant of one's beliefs. He thus laments (as might we all) "that so much of the energy of mankind has gone into fighting for ... the truth of creeds, religious, moral and political, as distinct from what has gone into effort to try creeds by putting them to the test of acting upon them" (QC: 221).

While Rorty rightly draws attention to the fact that Dewey sometimes overstates the difference between behaviours that are intelligent – the result of critical and experimental practices – and those predicated on mere habit, laziness, and deference to tradition, we don't need to follow Rorty in denying that there is no interesting contrast to be made between these. Instances of the latter are not difficult to find and, while it might sound vacuous in the abstract, assuming experimental attitudes and practices towards one's beliefs provides the best alternative to uncritical acquiescence. Such practices and attitudes are not reducible to purely political or moral considerations. The consequence of being 'critical' and 'experimental' about our values is not merely to assume a fallibilist attitude towards these – to be, as Rorty and Talisse say, modest. More importantly, it refers to the enterprise of improving the quality of beliefs.

To draw out the implications of this claim for democratic deliberation, it will help to look at Larry Hickman's discussion of Dewey's distinction between kinds of discourse. On Dewey's view, he claims,

the debates that take place as a part of experimental inquiry within the scientific-technical disciplines should be distinguished from two further classes of debates. They differ from those that take place between the partisans and critics of scientific-technical disciplines, and they also differ from those that take place completely outside of scientific-technical communities, that is, without the benefit of experimental techniques. (1995, 73)

The difference between these debates is the degree to which beliefs are treated as hypotheses. But additionally, and more importantly, this distinction is a qualitative one: it reflects the different quality of the beliefs at issue. In chapter 2, I cautioned against viewing Dewey's account of inquiry as scientific. This is far from the case, as successful inquiry is no less present in other domains, and genuine moral and political problems should not be reduced to the terms and theories of particular sciences. With this qualification in mind, the classes

of discourse that Hickman describes has a correlate for discussions of value. Being ‘scientific’ in this sense is not a question of subject-matter, but rather a question of the quality of such beliefs. Thus, Dewey elaborates this ideal as follows: “the purport of thinking, scientific and philosophic, is not to eliminate choice but to render it less arbitrary and more significant. It loses its arbitrary character when its quality and consequences are such as to commend themselves to the reflection of others” (EN: 35).

Of particular relevance to the present discussion is the distinction introduced in §2.3 between values acquiesced to and those arrived at through practices of inquiry. The political correlate of this view is that on a Deweyan account values only become articulated and refined in the way demanded by political life through the attempt to engage with those who dispute them. While this statement is so far in agreement with the Peircean positions I have discussed, the difference between them is nonetheless significant. On a Deweyan account, this claim that values become better through engaging with dissenting views does not require that we invoke an apolitical, neutral ground of epistemic standards to regulate these disputes, or legitimize democratic values. For Deweyans an appeal to norms that ‘everyone is already implicitly committed to’ is not only chimerical, but reverses the order of explanation. Such common ground, if it is to be available for politics, will be the consequence of political discourse, rather than an apolitical standard already in place in advance of any dispute.

Thus, contrary to Peircean accounts, not only values, but the very standards involved in moral and political inquiry are themselves contestable. As Hilary Putnam puts it, “Dewey’s view is that we don’t know what our interests and needs are or what we are capable of until we actually engage in politics” (1995, 189). To do otherwise – to treat our values or standards as relevant to, but immune from political negotiation, is to insulate these from our political practices. In short, it is to be foundational in imposing these standards upon politics without allowing them to be assessable on political grounds.

The consequence of experimentalism is not merely that we become open to the possibility that our beliefs are in need of revision. More importantly, it is that the articulation, elaboration, and development of our values through such political deliberation makes them

better – of higher quality – and more suited to collaborative democratic life. They are better adapted for engaging with the problems of a pluralistic democratic society. Putnam thus rightly concludes that on a Deweyan view “there can be no final answer to the question of how we should live, and therefore we should always leave it open to further discussion and experimentation. That is precisely why we need democracy” (Putnam 1995, 189). To fail to openly engage in deliberation regarding political and moral values is to assume that these are already settled. To do so weakens our values by insulating them from critical reflection. Thus, even the value and meaning of democracy itself must remain open to elaboration and refinement – it cannot be wholly determined in advance of politics.

It is now worth returning to Rorty’s challenge. Contrary to Dewey, among others who favour an epistemic justification of democratic ideals, he contends that “the advantage that well-read, reflective, leisured people have when it comes to deciding about the right thing to do is that they are more imaginative, not that they are more rational” (2007, 201). On the view I propose, this is a false dichotomy. To say that a commitment to inquiry and experimental attitudes enhances their quality does not preclude the role of creativity in responding to problems. At the same time, acknowledging the importance of imagination in this process does not preclude a qualitative distinction regarding how well such disputes have been politically negotiated. While I am willing to concede Rorty’s charge that Deweyan inquiry is politically non-neutral, that does not imply that there is nothing more than politics to it, even if epistemic features play an important role in the maintenance of our democratic ideals.

Deweyans can rightly insist that there are better and worse ways of justifying positions. But, contrary to Talisse’s charge, this does not imply that such positions inevitably rest upon some dogmatism or partisanship. Nor does such an account rule out the possibility of reasonable disagreement. While there are certainly some positions that might turn out to be unjustified (as one should hope), the strongest principled objection one can make is that beliefs or values should not be upheld by fiat. Political deliberation is not simply a matter of determining how best to act upon our shared values when we have them, but is more often

the attempt to generate common ground and determine how to proceed in the absence of shared principles.

While Talisse rightly notes that pluralism is a reality of contemporary democratic societies, he implausibly considers this to be a problem for a Deweyan account of democracy (2007, 185). As Michael Eldridge has exasperatedly noted, even if Deweyans were to concede that their views are comprehensive in the Rawlsian sense, “Talisse has utterly failed to show how the *possession* of a comprehensive doctrine forestalls the deliberative, democratic process. Possession or even advocacy of [an] ideal is not the same as imposition” (Eldridge 2012, 88). The mere having of moral, philosophical, or epistemic commitments only risks becoming an ‘imposition’ upon others if one is engaged in a justification of democratic society that, I have already argued, Deweyans should avoid.

Talisse directs his charges against Deweyans because he implausibly thinks that they are engaged in the same foundationalist project he is. He claims that any Deweyan account of democracy “aspires to design the whole of society according to [Deweyan] commitments” (2007, 87). Eldridge rightly dismisses this charge because it “portrays the ‘Deweyan democrat’ as shaping society according to her lights, forcing people to ‘live under’ a political system that they ‘could reasonably reject.’ This is preposterous. ... Talisse has converted Dewey and Deweyans into totalitarians” (2012, 88). Talisse’s criticism is preposterous not only because it assumes that Deweyans seek a foundational justification of democracy, and think, like Talisse, that democracy must be justified on non-circular, non-controversial grounds. It also runs contrary to epistemic features central to Deweyan accounts. “Whatever vision of the good society that Dewey may have had he would not have instituted it against the will of the people affected, for to do so would be undeliberative, unreconstructive, and elitist” (88).

The idea of social and political inquiry in a pluralistic democratic society arises from confronting the problem of how to proceed respectfully in the face of disagreements over values. To whatever extent that some values might be basic in the sense that serve as initial terms, this does not imply that such values are therefore immune to scrutiny. Nor does

having moral or political commitments imply that one must think that others must share in these. To do so would indeed be anti-pluralistic.

I take it as crucial to the idea of political inquiry and public reasoning is for such positions to be treated as contestable. The problem with Talisse's (and Misak's) justification of democracy is that it requires specific epistemic criteria to be beyond political contestability and ultimately constitutive of the notion of political reasonability. This demand is one that pragmatism, as an anti-foundational philosophy has good reason to reject. The issue in political deliberation is not whether someone has moral, political, or epistemic commitments: it would be naive to think people don't have these, or can simply set them aside. The issue is rather to ensure that these commitments remain contestable. While Talisse charges that Deweyan inquiry is 'thick' and anti-pluralist, the opposite is true: the distinction between better and worse values takes contestability as central. In response to Talisse's concerns about perfectionism, I concede that the account I have provided is non-neutral and, likely, philosophically controversial. The epistemic practices that a Deweyan view advocates has moral implications. However, this is not problematic for an account of democracy so long as such values remain contestable through political processes. Thus, as Melvin Rogers has claimed, a Deweyan account "places a limit – to be hammered out within political life, to be sure – on the extent to which that 'thickness' can be encoded into laws" (2009, 133). Such a limit would imply that any 'thick' norms must not be of the kind that make them insular and beyond political contestability.

Deweyan inquiry and democracy are synergistic – they are non-foundationally integrated; neither can be invoked as neutral, non-circular grounds for justifying the other. Nonetheless, the simultaneous commitment to both inquiry and democracy facilitates the achievement of both epistemic and political ideals. Democratic ideals such as freedom of speech and association are crucial to the continued functioning of moral and political inquiry (if not inquiry more generally), and without these political institutions in place our values risk becoming insulated from the critical negotiation required for their refinement.

In this sense, the Deweyan model of inquiry exemplifies democratic ideals of pluralism.

On this view, beliefs are improved as the consequence of critical engagement with a multiplicity of viewpoints and values. For inquiry to fail to be democratic in this sense would compromise its effectiveness. At the same time, democratic ideals of transparency and accountability are best achieved by practices of political negotiation that don't treat given beliefs as fully-formed prior to politics. Instead, a Deweyan view of democracy views beliefs that are the consequence of critical negotiation (inquiry) as vital to democratic political life. Thus, contrary to Rorty, the advocacy of Deweyan inquiry is not merely more politics, but crucial to maintaining both epistemically and politically desirable features of such societies. However, in agreement with Rorty, and in contrast to Misak and Talisse, these epistemic concerns cannot provide apolitical, non-circular grounds for democratic commitments, even though they play a crucial role in our understanding of this political ideal.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I proposed a Deweyan understanding of the relationship between epistemology and politics. On this view, the standards of legitimate political debate are an irreducibly political concern and cannot be invoked to justify the politics they facilitate. Yet, such standards cannot be left outside of the scope of legitimate political discourse, because they are both politically contestable and politically significant.

I placed this account of the integration of epistemological and political concerns between the foundationally-motivated epistemic defenses of democracy, common to Cheryl Misak and Robert Talisse, and the anti-epistemological ironism of Richard Rorty. Against Misak and Talisse, I charged that there are good pragmatist, and particularly Deweyan reasons to be wary of their justificatory demands. Against Rorty, I showed how epistemic concerns, while not playing a foundational role in our understanding of democracy nonetheless play an indispensable one. On my account, epistemological and political considerations are related synergistically rather than asymmetrically and foundationally – neither has priority over the other, yet the adoption of democracy facilitates and promotes practices of inquiry, and vice versa.

In chapter 2 I provided an interpretation of Dewey's theory of inquiry and its extension to ethics and politics. I explored why he thinks that the model of scientific problem-solving can be seamlessly extended to problems of politics and morality and examined the implications of this extension. In particular, I highlighted the central role of anti-foundationalism, holism, and fallibilism in exploring the prospects of Dewey's claims that a scientific approach to ethics is not only attainable, but of vital importance. That this account has political implication is made clear, as the critical and experimental habits he lauds has important implications for political deliberation. Thus, I showed how Dewey's epistemology lends itself to a particular vision of liberal politics. In doing so, I revealed the sense in which this account is

politically non-neutral.

In chapter 3, I explored Richard Rorty's criticism of Dewey's epistemological pretences, and contextualized it with respect to Rorty's more general challenge to epistemological philosophy. I argued that Rorty's anti-foundationalism, in particular, should be understood as a metaphilosophical thesis. Rather than narrowly arguing against epistemological foundations, i.e., whether epistemically basic claims are required for justification, Rorty's target is the claim that a philosophical theory of knowledge can underpin the legitimacy of knowledge in other fields. I showed how this thesis factors in Rorty's reading of Dewey, along with its implications for his philosophy of education. The stakes of Rorty's attempt to de-epistemologize Dewey's work is Rorty's claim that seemingly epistemic notions such as truthfulness and open-mindedness amount to little more than moral norms regarding our conduct with our peers – what Rorty calls 'conversational' norms. If this interpretation is right, then a Deweyan account of inquiry is simply politics by other means.

In chapter 4 I developed a critique of epistemic defences of democracy. Misak's attempt to derive a commitment to democracy from apolitical, purely epistemic considerations about belief reveals the foundational aim of her justificatory project. Rorty's arguments that attempt to blur the distinction between epistemological and moral norms provide reason to doubt that any such purely epistemic appeals are available. Further, while I share Rorty's meta-philosophical scruples about 'grounding' politics in the manner of Misak and Talisse, I argued that Dewey's work provides a way to see epistemology and politics as integrated without falling into the problematic claim that epistemology 'legitimizes' or 'grounds' political theory. The account I advocate is that epistemology as inquiry is synergistic rather than foundational with the commitment to democratic politics. In terms of the distinction I introduced in the introductory chapter, it is to say that Dewey's work provides an epistemic *account* of democratic practices without providing a foundational epistemic *defense* of them. Democratic and epistemic concerns promote one-another. However, this does not imply that either can or should be treated as prior.

In chapter 5 I contrasted my account with Talisse's Peircean defence of democracy and his

arguments against ‘Deweyan democracy’. Talisse’s account, I argue, implies a false neutrality for its epistemological claims and to that extent is misleading in its claim to provide a more suitable ground for democratic ideals than Deweyan epistemology does. Because the Deweyan account I provided can accommodate deep disagreement, contrary to Talisse’s charge, it has no difficulty accommodating political pluralism. While such an account is politically non-neutral, it is structured in such a way that its acknowledged non-neutrality is a virtue rather than a deficiency. Further, by combining political non-neutrality with the demand that any claim be open to experimental development, a Deweyan account of inquiry represents an important strategy for engaging with pluralism in a democratic society. Epistemic considerations, while not serving a foundational role are, contrary to Rorty’s charge, nonetheless playing an indispensable one.

Guide to References to John Dewey's Work

The references to John Dewey's work in this thesis are to the critical edition published by Southern Illinois University Press and edited by Jo Ann Boydston. References are made to the series edition followed by volume and page number. For example, (MW9: 281) refers to page 281 of the ninth volume of the Middle Works.

- EW *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Early Works, 1882-1898.* 5 volumes. Ed. Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- MW *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924.* 15 volumes. Ed. Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- LW *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953.* 17 volumes. Ed. Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

In addition to these standard references, I also use the following abbreviations:

- EN *Experience and Nature. The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953.* Vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988.
- QC *The Quest for Certainty. The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953.* Vol. 4, ed. Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990.
- LTI *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry. The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953.* Vol. 12, ed. Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991.

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